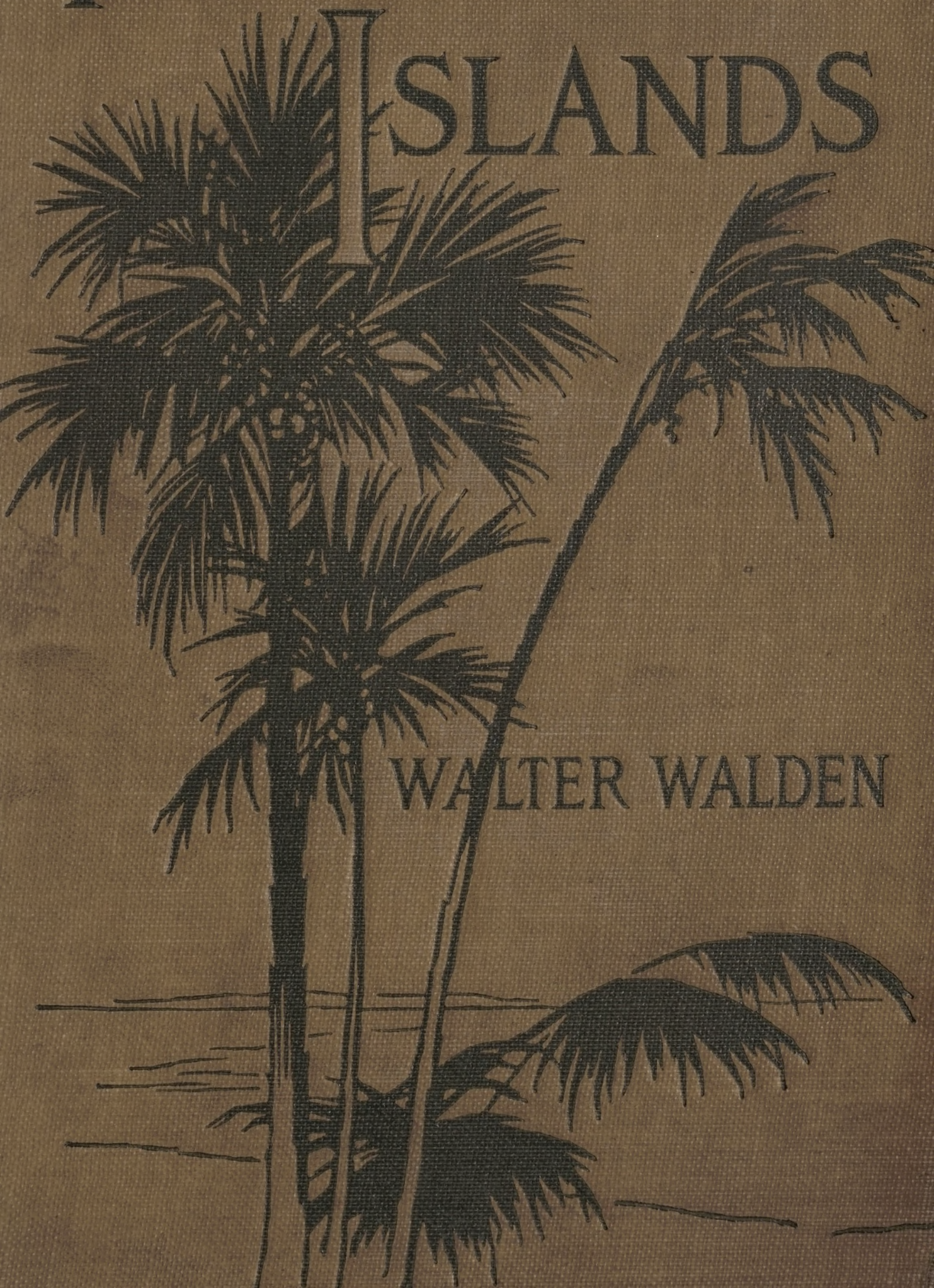


THE HIDDEN ISLANDS



WALTER WALDEN



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THE HIDDEN ISLANDS

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BY
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TO
MY SON, WALFORD
TO YOU, MY CONSTANT COMPANION
AND ENDEARED CHUM,
I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

M. V. G. W. V. 16-20.

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CHAPTER I

OLD FRIENDS AND NEW PROJECTS

THE train trundled steadily southward in the dark, in and out of the Louisiana clay banks. The two boys lolled on the cushioned car seats, in their travel-weariness all but forgetting about the new scenes and new adventures they journeyed towards; they had had one day and a night of it. There had been no talk for fifteen minutes. A glance now and then out of the car window revealed the dark and dancing outline of swiftly moving trees; and the wee flashes of stars showed in the intervals.

The momentarily augmented roar of the wheels on the rails, between the opening and the closing of the door as the porter entered, seemed to rouse one of the two (the taller, the chap of the sandy pate), and he stretched his arms aloft, gaping wearily.

"Say, Wayne," he began, "if this thing was to last another day, I'd drop off and hike it the rest of the way."

Wayne consulted his watch. "Only two hours more," said he; "it's nearly nine now."

"That's comforting," grumbled the other; "it's six hours since it was eight." Again a stretching and yawning. "I wish Blaisdell was going to meet us at the sta-

tion; I don't see how we're going to find the way — at midnight."

"Oh, don't you worry, Ray, we'll find it."

Ray pouted. "I don't see why you're always so all-fired sure. You always seem to know beforehand, like one of those — I don't know what you call them. Let's read the directions again."

So out came old Marvin Blaisdell's letter once more, and Wayne read aloud the directions for finding the way.

The train cut along resolutely for another hour. And then, to the boys, everything seemed to take on a new fashion. The members of the train crew began to whistle popular tunes, tripping up and down the aisle, and banging the car doors, all in a cheerful bustle of preparation. Passengers filed into the washroom to slop off the grime of travel. Then, presently, the boys became aware of an unusual fragrance of flowers; and there came, too, in time, the smell of the salt sea, new to their nostrils.

Weariness left them, they had begun to see the end of their long journey. Their eyes sought to pick out objects without, sunk in the darkness. Then came the low and more musically-toned rumble, as they made over a long bridge. A little space, and then the porter appeared again, and sang out cheerily — "*New Orleans — New Orleans!*"

Wayne and Ray joined the eager procession, and soon stood outside of the station, on the street, looking for the street-car. It came; and at a quarter past eleven of this

June night, they were afoot again — on broad, brilliantly lighted Canal Street, waiting for another car, that was to take them far out on Tchoupetoulas Street, to a certain corner mentioned in Marvin Blaisdell's letter.

They had not long to wait, and again found a corner of the car, where they set their suit-cases behind their shanks; and as the car trundled on, the boys entertained themselves with studying the advertising posters over the windows, many of which were exact duplicates of some they had become familiar with in their northern home town. The few other passengers had soon left the street-car; and the conductor, now and again, sauntered to the front to exchange gossip with the motorman. Wayne and Ray noted, as they went, that fewer and fewer lights showed without; till finally the conductor called out, "Here's your street, boys," and clanged the bell.

The brilliant car moved on, leaving the two beside the track, literally dropped in a sea of gloom. To be sure, on one corner a yellow light on a post made pretence to gleam, sending its faint beams as far as to a ramshackle house close to the walk; but it served but to accentuate the darkness all about. As the boys stood, uncertain, a very distant bell tolled out dismally; the intervals between the strokes were dolorously long, like a funeral knell — the strokes twelve in number. From speaking in low tones the boys got to whispering; it might be a neighborhood of thieves and cutthroats, and it were well to make as little noise as possible.

"Well," said Ray, "which way do we go now?"

"To the left, I'm pretty sure," said Wayne. "There are no lights that way."

"There aren't any to talk about *any* way," said Ray; "but I like a little, if I can't get a lot. But you're the leader, and you mostly guess right."

So to the left they moved. For perhaps half a block, they felt a ragged walk under them; then it broke short off, and their feet fumbled forward over what seemed a cinder pathway.

"Wish we'd thought to take a flashlight along," murmured Ray. "I feel as if I was going to hit a hole clear through to China every step."

Wayne pushed forward confidently; presently a big black mass loomed before. In another minute he stooped and took up something in his hand.

"Sawdust," he said. "Here's the sawmill."

"You guessed again," confessed Ray.

The boys had sawmills in their home town in Illinois; they sought out the stairs, and directly were mounting in the blackness. At the top they picked their way till they came to the summit of the incline, up which the logs were hauled from the water. They could make out the river below. Wayne led, going down the gangway; and at the bottom, the boys cast their eyes about on the many objects that lay in the obscurity that covered the river. They stooped low, and to the right a square outline of something showed against the dim sky.

"There's the *Whippoorwill*!" said both boys together. The houseboat lay some fifty feet away.

"Blaisdell!" called out Wayne. "Blaisdell!" And waited. No response. He felt about and picked up some pieces of bark. With these he bombarded the roof and side of the houseboat.

"Eh!" came a call from within.

Then a figure appeared on the deck.

"Hello, Mr. Blaisdell!" called Wayne.

"Eh!"

"Hello, Mr. Blaisdell!" repeated Wayne.

"Oh, Wayne. Well, well, I hadn't looked for you in the night. Wait, I'll push the boat over."

The skiff came skipping over, and the boys were soon on the deck of the houseboat.

"And here's Ray, too. Well, well. And how did you find the way in the dark?"

"Oh, Wayne, here," volunteered Ray, "he's got second sight. I'd never have found it."

And then all went within.

"It seems good to see the old *Whippoorwill*," said Wayne.

"Surely it must," said Mr. Blaisdell; and he smiled through his mass of gray whiskers. "And now you're after hunting adventures on the broad seas. Well now, you boys stretch yourselves out in that bunk over there for a few minutes and rest yourselves."

The boys complied; and Mr. Blaisdell dodged into the galley.

"And now we're 'way down south," said Ray. "Smells tropical, too. You've been reading up — what's those sweet smells, anyway?"

"Oh, orange blossoms, and magnolias, and I guess some fig trees," said Wayne.

Soon odors from the galley set the boys' appetites sharp; and their host appeared.

"Now for a snack, boys," he said.

Fried ham, eggs, and potatoes, biscuits and molasses; and presently a dish that puzzled them.

Mr. Blaisdell smiled. "Fried bananas," he explained. "We get them properly ripe in New Orleans."

"It seems kind of wonderful that you should come to own our houseboat," said Ray.

"Yes," said Mr. Blaisdell. "You see, it was this way — as I hinted in my letters: When I got to St. Louis, and sold all my pearls, I got a good deal more for them than I expected; a nice little fortune for a lone old man with few wants. So I decided to take a rest. And one day, having little to do, I hunted down along the levee, thinking to get my eye on your houseboat. And I found it with a For Sale sign on it. A happy idea took me, and I bought it, and floated down here to New Orleans."

"Well, I'm mighty glad no one else got it," said Wayne.

And then came talk of the boys' ambitions.

"We had been wishing," Wayne was saying; "that we could go on a cruise on the Gulf of Mexico. But of course that would cost too much. Yet we liked to talk about it, anyway; and we studied maps and practised sailing with the skiffs, and read sea books. And then, this spring, Mr. Maclay called a special meeting, and told us he'd seen our parents, and he had found a way that maybe (not sure) maybe we could take that cruise on the Gulf."

"You ought to've seen the roof bulge out," broke in Ray.

"Mr. Maclay wouldn't say where the money was coming from," resumed Wayne. "He just said, 'A good fairy.' But it isn't hard to guess it's the Widow Albright. She's been getting a lot of money out of the stone quarry; and she's always talking about how we got back her land for her. And now the rest of the fellows are ready to jump on the train just as soon as we find the right kind of a ship."

"Yes," said Mr. Blaisdell; "ever since I got Mr. Maclay's letter I've been looking out. There's a new friend I've made, an old planter — Lamartine — lives on the other side of the river. I'll take you to see him. He says there's a relative of his just died; and a small schooner, in which he did some small trade, is to be sold by the marshal, under the hammer. If the bidders are

not too keen, it might be a chance to get what you want at a low figure."

The boys lay in their bunks in the old *Whippoorwill* for some time, awake, building pictures of coming experiences to be had along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. But even in their wildest imaginings there was no hint of the adventures actually in store for them, which were to grow out of old Marvin Blaisdell's new-made down south friends.

In spite of the tardy hour of crawling in, Wayne and Ray were out early, making a shrimp-trap, under Mr. Blaisdell's direction — of a hoop and a gunny-sack. This they let down to the bottom of the river. There followed a few hours of exploration in this less attractive portion of the city, back from the river. But the boys found interest in the sour-orange trees, and the figs, and other tropic growths that hung over the tumble-down fences. They were back for an early dinner; and made ready for the trip over the river — the same old Mississippi that went by their home, so far away.

The river is very broad here. When the boat had come into the lesser current of the farther shore, Wayne and Ray kept their oars creaking till Mr. Blaisdell directed them to a landing, about two miles up. The little party crossed the levee, and approached a quaint old plantation home, set amidst trees and a half-tended garden. Back, and to one side, the boys made out the plain negro quarters: a half dozen small, solid blocks of cabins, set

on short massive posts, in a row. Only one bore marks of occupancy, the others abandoned to decay.

"Howdy, Mistah Blaisdell," came a salutation from the porch.

The boys saw a slender, gray moustached gentleman, coming down the step.

"Ah! you'ah Boy Scout friends," said the man, when Mr. Blaisdell had introduced them.

A cheerful-visaged black man brought out chairs.

"I heah that you contemplate a cruise on the Gulf," observed Mr. Lamartine.

"Yes, sir," said Wayne, "if we can find a suitable vessel, and a good sailor."

Mr. Lamartine made observation that good sailors were not hard to find in New Orleans, and that it was seldom that one had long to look for vessels seeking buyers.

"As I have been telling my dear friend, Mr. Blaisdell, here," he said, "I have been info'med that a small schooner left by the death of a — ah — connection of mine, is to be sold at auction."

His mention of this "connection" of his was made with some show of disrelish. Later, the boys had occasion to recollect this circumstance, as well as the sad face of Mr. Lamartine, and other evidences of some old trouble that showed in the old southerner's demeanor.

"Rufe!" he presently called. And when the smiling black man appeared — "Bring the bundle of papahs."

Soon there was spread before the boys' eyes a sheet, bearing, among innumerable other advertisements, the announcement by the "United States Marshal for the Eastern District of Louisiana"—that there should be sold at public auction, on June 10th, at 12 o'clock, M., at the main entrance to the Custom House on Canal Street in the city of New Orleans, the "Schooner *Mercier*, her tackle, sails, and apparel, as she now lies in the New Canal near Claiborne Street, in the port of New Orleans."

A pleasant hour was spent with the lonely old gentleman. Then the boys rowed back to the *Whippoorwill*, eager for the next step in their quest. The sun was low, beyond the river, when they made fast the skiff's painter to the houseboat. The raising of the gunny-sack gave them nearly a quart of shrimps, that went to the making of the supper.

CHAPTER II

THE SCHOONER *MERCIER*

THE next morning, June 8th, the impatient Wayne and Ray, with Mr. Blaisdell for guide, were abroad early again. An hour's ride, and then a walk to the New Basin; picking their way among barrels and boxes, and other odds and ends peculiar to wharves, they finally arrived at the spot where the canal put an end to Claiborne Street.

Schooners of various sizes, and differing as well in raiment and social standing, lined the canal. But the boys were not long in spying out a stern from which the name *Mercier* spoke out in plain white letters.

"There she is!" said Ray.

Wayne was already hurrying to her side. Mainsail, foresail, and jib were neatly folded under the gaskets. A cabin roof peeped above the rail, forward of the wheel; the box of a galley, flanked by water butts, nestled between the cabin and mainmast; then came the hatch, and forward of the foremast, a small scuttle, the windlass; and the anchor graced the bows.

The three climbed aboard the lonely vessel. The cabin scuttle was padlocked.

"There's four bunks," said Wayne, his eyes at a window, "and a table, and a bureau, and lockers."

They found access through the forward scuttle into the wee forecastle, where were four bunks and some coils of rope. The galley door was locked, but the window allowed view of a stove and cooking tools, and a cupboard. The hatch-cover was off, and the three looked into an empty hold — here and there bits of oyster shells.

"She looks like about our size," said Wayne. "Don't you think so, Mr. Blaisdell?"

"It was just so I was thinking," answered the old gentleman. "And I should say she is a seaworthy boat."

"Let's see how long she is," said Ray. And he began to pace from stern to bowsprit. "Between forty and fifty," he presently called from the bow.

"And she's a little over fifteen feet in the beam," added Wayne, having paced across amidships.

Carved on a timber of the hatchway, they read — "19 I-10 tons."

"Do you think there's any chance of our getting her under two hundred fifty dollars, Mr. Blaisdell?" Wayne looked his doubts.

"It's hard telling, my boy," said Mr. Blaisdell; "but I think maybe it's not so unlikely.— Here, let's ask this chap."

He accosted a man passing. The man told of a recent instance of a twelve ton schooner selling for forty dol-

lars. But there were other interested parties that had inspected the *Mercier*, he said, and likely to be more.

Our three explored the basin, for some way, up and down, and the boys bought and searched the advertising columns of the daily papers, but touched on nothing nearly so promising as the schooner *Mercier*. They had two days to wait for the sale; and to relieve the suspense, Mr. Blaisdell started them off on a tour of sight-seeing.

First, he led them to the Poydras Market, where, in the booths, fish, turtles, crabs, vegetables, and the like, were finding sale. Then they perched on a trio of tall stools, before a lunch counter; and there was set before them such coffee as they had never tasted, and enormous doughnuts, jelly-filled.

Crossing Canal Street, they passed into the environs of the old New Orleans. On Chartres Street, in the bird and animal stores, they watched the sleepy alligators, and listened to the garrulous parrots. At Jackson Square the old three-spired St. Louis Cathedral awaited them; and its bells chimed for them. One after another of the old historic buildings loomed up: the Haunted House; and on the corner of Dauphine and Orleans, the house of the "Tree of the Dead."

"Here," said Mr. Blaisdell, "the exiled brother of the Sultan of Turkey was stabbed to death in 1727 — the assassins were sent from Turkey expressly to do the deed. From the grave there grew a tall date palm."

They peeped into an old drinking-place, where the

pirate Lafitte used to idle his time away (a name the boys were destined to reckon with); and looked over the noted French Opera House. And they didn't miss queer old Exchange Alley, with its overhanging balconies.

So interested were the boys in this quaint old section, they must go back the next day, in spite of the heat, and go over some of the same ground in addition to much else, notably the French Market. Under these old long sheds, with the age-stained pillars, the boys never tired of witnessing the bustle of marketing, and watching live crabs, and turtles who winked at them, and listening to the foreign talk. They again sought out a lunch-counter, where an oyster stew (and such an oyster stew!) was topped off with that same wonderful drip-coffee, rich cream, and jellied doughnuts. "Ah, gee!" said Ray, "a couple more, please — beats my flap-jacks."

Then next day, the *Whippoorwill* was again left to take care of herself, at the foot of the log-slide, and Wayne, Ray, and Mr. Blaisdell set off down town. This time there was serious business in hand. It was decided to leave Ray's ready tongue to do the bidding. A group waited at the Custom House. At twelve the auctioneer appeared.

A description of the schooner *Mercier* was read, her qualities extolled, and then — "How much am I bid?"

"Twenty dollar," faltered out a voice.

"Twenty-five!" snapped out Ray, quick and sharp.

“Bah! friends,” scolded the auctioneer. “This is no row-boat.”

“Thirty,” spoke out another.

“Forty!” came from Ray, like a flash.

And so it went for a time. Wayne got over among the other bidding parties and heard some of their talk. Then he hurried to Ray’s side, and spoke in his ear.

“Those men,” he said, “have got the idea that you are bidding in the interest of relatives of the last owner — determined to get it. Some think there isn’t much use bidding against you.”

Ray put even more “pep” into his demeanor. Finally one hundred was bid, and Ray snapped out — “One Hundred and five!” Then two or three heads came together for a moment’s colloquy, following which all bidding seemed to have come to an inglorious end.

“Hundred and five! — hundred and five!” called the auctioneer, “who’ll make it a ten?”

But with all his urging he could not win another bid. All the bidders seemed at once to have become but stubbornly silent listeners to his harangue; till finally chagrin and anger showed in the auctioneer. And then, with a vicious bang, down came the hammer.

“Sold! for one hundred and five dollars,” was his verdict.

The group broke up, and Wayne, Ray, and Mr. Blaisdell prepared to follow the auctioneer and clerk into the

Marshal's office. The boys met the smiling face of a handsome chap, as they turned.

"Ver' good little schooner you ged," he said, "and you ged her ver' cheap. I congradulate."

He shook the boys' hands cordially, and was off.

The money paid, and the "bill of sale" in hand, the three left the Marshal's rooms, and sought a telegraph office. The good news was put into a telegram addressed to the other six members of the patrol, waiting in River-ton, Illinois.

"We have bought schooner. She couldn't be better if she was built purposely. Don't forget our trunks, and come right off."

Within the hour, the boys and their old friend were down to the New Basin and aboard the *Mercier*. Wayne whipped out of his pocket a *Whippoorwill Patrol* pennant, and in a little, it fluttered at the mainmast head.

"She's all ours!" enthused Ray. "Hooray!"

Sunday intervened.

Monday morning found them aboard the *Mercier* again, their minds taken up with the next problem — to find a suitable sailing-master for their new ship. The boys had gone into the little galley for a hasty inventory of the pots and pans and other pieces of cooking tools. Wayne's eye chanced to a view of someone standing out on the quay, eyes on the schooner. It was the handsome fellow whom they had met on the Custom House steps the day before. Wayne stepped out.

"Come aboard, sir," he bade the man.

"Good morning," said the man, as he skipped lightly over the schooner's rail.

Jean Marat, he said, was his name.

"I like to see the *Mercier* once more, before she go away," he explained. "You see, I sail her for the old Mister Lamartine — four year I sail in her. Ah, he was one extraordinar' old man, thad Pedro Lamartine."

"What did he use the schooner for?" asked Wayne.

"Ah!" The dark complexioned stranger shrugged his shoulders and seated himself on the rail. "He breeng shell — the oyster shell — from down in thee Gulf somewhere —"

"If you sailed in her," queried Ray, "don't you know where from?"

Marat shook his head. "No, I never did know. And no one in the crew did know, excep' one black man — Loyo — who is servant to ol' Pedro Lamartine ver' many year. I do not theenk eet was just the shell that was Lamartine hees bus-i-ness; but he do not tell any one. And I do not ask, for I do not have too much the curious' about some one else hees business. And then, if a sailor — if he come to have too much the curious', ol' Pedro he discharge heem. You see, Lamartine he have one other schooner much like thees one — the *Miguel* — and when thees one sail out to the Gulf, we meet the *Miguel* some place — thad ees, we make anchor one side one island, and the *Miguel* make anchor thee other side; and

thee crew of the *Mercier* row roun' to the Miguel, and the crew of the *Miguel* row roun' thee other way to the *Mercier*. And then we take the *Miguel*, load weeth the shell, to New Orleans, and the other crew take the *Mercier* out for more of thee shell. You see, my crew never go to where ol' Lamartine ged the shell, and we never see the other crew thad do go."

"I see," said Ray, "old Pedro Lamartine didn't want any one to know where he got the shells."

"Yes," agreed Marat, "that was id. Sometime he go in the schooner that go out. And then hees black man, Loyo, go in to New Orleans with the shell, with me. Loyo, he is out now."

"Does the black fellow know that Pedro Lamartine is dead?" questioned Wayne.

"No," said Marat, "I theenk he donot know. Pedro Lamartine die more than four weeks back, and no one know about Lamartine hees bus-i-ness. I tell thee Court about Loyo, and thee Court wait for Loyo to come. It was time the *Mercier* should meet him two week back; but maybe Loyo wait for the nex' time. Pedro Lamartine he die in thad cabin."

Marat led the way to the cabin, and within, he pointed out the bunk, furnished with a wire-spring and mattress, in which old Pedro Lamartine had breathed his last gasp of life.

"He have some sickness in the heart," explained Jean Marat, placing his hand over his own. "He have one

attack when we come through thee Rigolets — and he die. He was not happy, that ol' Pedro Lamartine. He have too much money I theenk. He always suspicious of any who come at him, and he never make much talk with any one excep' Loyo."

"Maybe he was smuggling something," suggested Ray.

"No," declared Marat. "He alway see the revenue officers and pay thee duty."

Jean Marat's story gave the schooner *Mercier* an added — a romantic — interest for the boys; and, too, this pleasant-faced Creole sailor began to grow in their esteem; and there grew in them also an idea that soon found voice.

"Mr. Marat," presently began Wayne, and there was somewhat an eager light in his eyes, "we are looking for some one to help us sail this schooner on our trip —"

There was an interested gleam in Marat's eye as Ray broke in:

"Mr. Wayne Scott, here, is too modest to come out with it flat, but the size of it is, that we'd like to have you, if you can, and your price is within our reach."

Wayne's look gave corroboration.

Marat smiled and said: "I have been making some plan to take some little rest; I have sail all thee time for four year. Well, I will come tomorrow and tell you if I can change my plan. And maybe if not, I can help you to fin' some one who weel do for you."

Jean Marat waved back a friendly salutation as he disappeared round a building backing the quay.

"He's ours," declared Ray.

"Hope so," said Wayne.

Mr. Blaidell appealed to for his word, looked up from his fingers — at the finishing the whipping of a rope's end. "I think you'll be very fortunate if you get him. He knows the boat; and integrity shines out all over him. And now which is it, the French Market, or Poydras, for lunch?"

"French!" said both boys together.

As the three moved market-ward, through the streets, Wayne's abstraction was apparent. Ray gave him a glance or two, and then edged up to Mr. Blaisdell and spoke in pretended confidence.

"Say, Mr. Blaisdell," said he, "our patrol leader, here, has jumped into the belly of another whale of a mystery. I'll bet he'll be a regular Jonah on our hands till he's got that old Pedro's shell game all figured out."

Going in at one end of the long low shed, they passed down with the procession by the colonnade, among booths displaying tropical fruits, vegetables, fish, crabs, and shrimps, fresh from the water. They were making straight for the lunch-counter at the far end. Then, before them, making purchases, they came upon Jean Marat.

"Ah! my frien's, these is fortunate," he smiled. "I was jus' these momen' theenking how pleasant to have

you come and have thee lunch with me, and meet my moth-er."

Excuses of politeness were vain, and our party was borne along among ancient-looking structures, and introduced to tidy and home-like quarters on a second floor.

"Make yourselv' free," said Marat, with a graceful wave of the hand, "and permid me to leave you one minute."

He disappeared through a door, and his voice was heard joined with another.

The boys observed with interest the old pieces of furniture; and the many samples of curious shells and coral that covered an old book case, and the mantel, above which hung the framed likeness of a gentleman in officer's uniform; and apparently, the real sword of the picture having a place on the wall above.

"Marat senior," suggested Ray.

The voices from the back continued for some time. And then the door opened, and our three rose to meet a dignified and most handsome old lady, with a smile like her son's.

"My mother," said Jean Marat, with some hint of pride in his tone and manner.

Each guest pronounced his name for her as he took her hand, and she repeated it in her quaint and pleasing foreign enunciation. Waved back to their chairs, Mr. Blaisdell gave Madame Marat some account of the boys and their ambition for a taste of the sea, and some hint

of their new-found desire to put themselves under the guidance of her son, for whom they had already begun to feel some attachment.

She looked on the boys with a mother's eyes for some moments of silence.

“And they have mothers at home,” she then said, with a tender softness of tone, “who pray for their safe’ and happiness.— Ah, *oui!* they shall have my Jean. I can not sl’p in thee night eef I feel they do not have one who ees good to look out for them.”

And so it was decided. And she went to join Jean, who was attending in the back. And presently all were seated at the table. It was then the boys had their palates tickled with crayfish bisque, daube, and other savory French things, unlike anything they’d ever yet put to their tasters.

Madame finally allowed her guests to go, exacting the promise of an early repetition of their visit.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERY OF THE SCHOONER

THE remainder of the day was given to some preparation for the coming of the other six adventurers. And then Wayne and Ray dismounted from the street-car at the station, at ten thirty. A little past eleven, the expected train came rumbling into the long shed. The two boys stood at the high iron fence, eyes eager, as the train vomited its passengers.

"There's Phil!" said Ray, "and Leslie — they're all there!"

"Hello! Ray."

"Hello! Charlie."

"Hello! Wayne."

"Hello! Slicky."

"Hello! Bert."

"Hello! Joe."

There filed through the gate: Leslie Dunn, Charles Manners, Phil Conger, Bert Hill, Joe Hunt, and Robert (Slicky) Murtry.

As the street-car trundled on through the night, Ray's and Wayne's tongues were kept going at a rate, with much urging. They were required to give detailed account of their movements since leaving Riverton.

"And say, fellows!" finally came from Ray.
"Wayne's found another cryptograph."

The hubbub that then was let loose attracted the few other passengers; and Ray drew the heads of the boys close.

"Well, it isn't exactly a cryptograph," he went on.
"But it's a mystery just the same. And you know what a funeral it'll be till he gets his claws into it. It's about our schooner — and there's a ghost in that schooner already."

"Aw, cut out the preliminaries!" complained Phil.

And so Ray repeated the story told by Jean Marat.

At their corner, the boys left the car and marched toward the river in the dark.

"I guess old Pedro Lamartine smuggled something on the side," ventured Charlie Manners.

"No," declared Ray, "Jean Marat said he was always straight with the revenue officers."

Mr. Blaisdell awaited the crew on the house-boat; and soon the good old *Whippoorwill* was noisy with feasting, and recounting of past adventures, and vain conjectures as to those now to come.

June thirteenth dawned hot. The impatient boys were on the way to where Claiborne met the New Basin.

"Scrumptious! Ain't she a daisy! Just our size! Purty as her name!" The encomiums were sung to the schooner *Mercier*.

"Too bad she's got to have a ghost," said Phil.

"That's one of the best parts of her," said Ray.
"— Ask Wayne."

Jean Marat soon appeared, and introductions went round.

"I like thee look of my crew," said Marat.

And the crew saluted.

"And now, how soon weel you sail?" asked Marat.

The boys all looked to their leader.

"As soon as we can get ready," responded Wayne.

"Ah," said Marat. "And now we make some list of theengs we need to ged."

Ray made notes as Jean Marat enumerated desirable articles of wear, stores, and so on.

Wayne and Robert remained on board with Marat, to help overhaul rigging and the like; Ray led the others forth to begin the purchasing. At noon, at the Poydras Market, Wayne and Robert parted with Marat, who was to visit the ship chandlers for some rope and a block or two. The two boys returned to the schooner.

With not the least premonition of setting his foot in the way of a discovery that was to turn round the whole course of events Wayne made a most natural move.

"Let's give the cabin a good cleaning out," said he, going through the scuttle.

"It's awful hot and stuffy in here," observed Robert, who had followed.

"Yes," agreed Wayne. "Marat says they always slept on deck in the hot season — all except old Lamar-

tine. He says the old fellow always slept in his bunk, summer or winter. Let's get out his smelly old mattress."

So Robert pulled the mattress out to the deck.

Wayne was setting his fingers to one of a pair of hooks that held the spring fast in the bunk, wondering over the need of such security, when his eye was arrested by a slight peculiarity in the contexture of the back wall. Where the bed-spring touched the wall the narrow plank was sawed through in two places, about eight inches apart. But it was not this alone that so much took Wayne's interest; the paint on this short bit of plank bore the soil marks of much thumbing. He brought out his knife and tried to pry out the piece. It held fast.

Then some inches below, protected by the bunk-spring, his eye was attracted to a hole in the wall, of a size to fit a nail.

Wayne mounted through the scuttle to the deck, and found Robert interestedly watching a tug-towed procession of fruit-laden schooners, just arrived. His hand clutched several bananas. Wayne, with other interest, jumped onto the quay; and directly returned, holding a piece of telegraph wire. Back again in the cabin, he set the end of his wire into the hole. Then came a push on something stiffly yielding, like a bit of clock-spring — and the piece of eight inches of plank above popped out from the wall half an inch.

Wayne then set his fingers to the sides and pulled out a

drawer. Robert was just coming below to begin a story about the fruit schooners, only to be cut short by Wayne's more startling revelations.

"A secret drawer," Wayne explained.

Putting his hand in to the back of the recess, he felt two spiral springs, which had served to push the drawer out when released by the spring catch below. In the drawer the boys found a small account book and two large envelopes. One was addressed: "To Julian Lamartine," the other: "To Loyo." Beside these, a leather bag, tied with thongs, lay in a corner. It seemed as if it might hold a handful of beads.

"We won't open it till Jean Marat comes," said Wayne.

Marat appeared within the hour, rope laden.

"Ah, eet was ver' clever in you to fin' thad," said Marat, when Wayne had told him of his discovery; "I never know of thad."

Wayne untied the bag and poured its contents into his hat.

"Pearls!" said Robert.

"Yes," said Marat. "It ees like sometime' I suspec'. He tell no one of thee pearl', excep', I guess, the officers. Led us look in thees book.—Yes, I see here thad he pay the duty on the pearl' w'en we meet the officeers this trip. Never have he speak once aboud thad he have the pearl'."

"What are we going to do with these things?" said Wayne.

"Ah, yes," said Marat. "They will, of course, have to go to the Court. But you say you have met the cousin of Pedro Lamartine."

"Yes, Mr. Charles Lamartine," said Wayne.

"He maybe know," said Marat, "who is thees Julian Lamartine thad thee letter is address'."

So it was decided to go first to the old planter across the Mississippi, the only known living relative of Pedro. And Marat and Wayne made up a packet of the contents of the secret drawer and set off at once, leaving Robert to await the coming of the boys.

The two found Mr. Blaisdell on board the *Whippoorwill*, who rowed with them across to the Lamartine plantation.

The lonely old gentleman met them with his usual smile of welcome. And Wayne looked on Mr. Lamartine's face with not a guess that he was about to touch on the one great trouble of the old southerner's life.

While Wayne undid the packet on the table, Mr. Blaisdell gave a short account of Wayne's discovery of the secret drawer in Pedro Lamartine's bunk. Then he took up the envelope addressed to Julian Lamartine, handing it to the old gentleman.

"We thought you might know the one to whom this is addressed," said Mr. Blaisdell.

Mr. Lamartine, who had so far shown little more than a polite interest, reached for the long envelope. His eyes had barely turned upon the writing, when his hand

began to shake, his face to turn a ghastly white; the envelope fell to the floor, and the old gentleman collapsed in his chair.

Wayne ran to the door, opened and called, "Rufe!"

The darky appeared.

"Yas, seh," he replied to Wayne's explanation, and in very short space he had a tumbler of wine to his old master's lips.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said Mr. Lamartine, when he had recovered. "That is a name very dear to me. It is the name of one of whom I have been bereaved these eleven years. I beg, Mr. Blaisdell, that you will read what is within."

It was with a show of eagerness that he watched Mr. Blaisdell take out and unfold the written sheets.

Mr. Blaisdell began:

To Julian Lamartine —

I beg that you will restrain as much as you can the feelings of bitterness, and I fear worse, that may rise in you as you read these confessions of a wretched and penitent old man.

I have practiced deceit on you all these years, in making you believe that your grandfather, my cousin, Charles Lamartine, was in the grave. He still lives and grieves you. My motive in this deceit, cowardly as I confess it to be, you will understand as you read.

It is now more than ten years since I stole you away from your home. It came about in this way: After buying the secret of the pearl oyster banks, I was low in money; and it became necessary to buy boats and tools.

I knew that, many years back, my father had loaned to the father of my cousin Henri Lamartine, fifteen thousand dollars; and though I could not find the note, I went to cousin Henri and demanded payment. Henri made the declaration that the note had been paid before the deaths of our fathers, and that the note had been destroyed. I persisted, and the breach between us — that had begun with our fathers — widened. I determined to gain by force the money Henri refused to pay, for I knew he had considerable in cash, and that it was not in bank. I watched till I learned its hiding-place. And then, on the fatal night, I forced a way into the house when all were asleep, set a candle on the floor by the fire-place, and pried out a stone. I lifted out and forced open the box, and was beginning to count out the fifteen thousand dollars that I believed was due me, when I heard the stairs creak under a foot. I looked up, and Henri rushed down the stairs, stumbling on the bottom steps and striking his head on a stone of the fire-place.

He lay limp. I stooped over him. He was dead.

Then you, a little boy, had come, and I felt you beside me. You were six, and old enough to say what you had seen. You believed I had killed Henri (though afterwards I told you a story that convinced you it was an accident). My cowardice took possession. I grabbed you up, seized the money-box, and fled.

Believe me now, Julian. I swear this is how it happened. I did not commit murder; I did not mean to take all the money — twenty-eight thousand — which was in the box. I dared not attempt to return the rest. It was afterward that I found evidence that the note for fifteen thousand had truly been paid, as Henri said.

But I have now also to confess that for years I took a secret delight in the pain your disappearance caused your grandfather, Charles. He had forbidden me to come

near his house, and insulted me with talk. I confess I read with satisfaction newspaper reports that he was arrested for the murder of Henri, on evidence of a quarrel between them that same night. He was soon freed.

Julian, all these years of my wrong-doing have been years of misery for me. My penitence has grown; yet I have not had courage to jeopardize myself by making things right. But now I have a disease of the heart that may take me off any time; and I want to make what reparation I can. I have made you heir to all I have. I have made a will. It lies in hiding in the piece of land where you now are. Loyo will find the spot. There also lie the choicest of the pearls I have taken from the sea. I recommend that you make sale of them, piecemeal, in foreign markets, where they will bring the better price. I have but two boons to ask you: that you will believe in my penitence and try to forgive me; that you will expend \$10,000 in making my faithful Loyo a comfortable home.

I may have a month or a year to live. When I am gone, Loyo knows where to look for my last word to you, and to him.

Forgive a miserable old penitent.

PEDRO LAMARTINE.

“Julian lives!” spoke old Charles Lamartine, who with difficulty had contained himself during the reading. Great joy shone in his face. “Julian lives! Thank God! — Thank God! I’d almost given up all hope.”

He got on his feet and made several paces forth and back.

“Gentlemen,” his smile was good to see, “I could forgive him myself — I am a happy old man.”

Then he told the story of his bereavement. How on

that evening he had gone to his cousin Henri's home, taking his orphan grandson, Julian, along; how he had quarrelled with Henri for not forbidding his house to the despised Pedro, whose father had disgraced the Lamartine name by his marriage and his usurious practices; the son Pedro following in his tracks, besides inheriting his mother's miserliness, and other ill dispositions. He told how in the morning Henri's body was found, and he, Charles, arrested, the quarrel being known; but soon acquitted on evidence; how his grandson had disappeared that same fatal night, never to be heard of again.

"And now," said Charles Lamartine, showing a bit disturbed, "where is my little Julian? Where can I find him?"

"Ah," said Jean Marat, "w'en we see Loyo — he know."

The letter addressed to Loyo was short, recommending Julian to his care, and directing him to search out a copper coffer, holding some treasure to be put into the hands of Julian; and a reference to some method — in which Loyo had been drilled — for locating the treasure.

And then came a discussion of probabilities. How was Loyo to know? How was he to come? Where was he? Jean Marat alone could say what was best to be done; and when our little party rowed back to the house-boat, Wayne's mind bubbled with enthusiasm over a plan which he meant to lay before his comrades.

It was in the dark they made fast to the *Whippoorwill*. All the others were by that time aboard.

Then came the story all over again. The boys were much moved by the thing, seeing which, Mr. Blaisdell offered a word.

"Well, lads," he said, "it looks very much to me as if you had, in buying the *Mercier*, come into inheritance of a call to do what you can to help find this boy who was kidnapped so many years ago."

Wayne had his say; and Jean Marat offered counsel; and it was finally decided. Moreover, a definite purpose would give them no less experience of the sea. And Wayne, in particular, thrilled with the prospect.

CHAPTER IV

THE VOYAGE BEGINS

THE canal smoked with the heat. On the deck of the schooner *Mercier*, the eight boys were grouped about their old friend, Marvin Blaisdell, who offered them words of advice.

"The open sea is not quite like the old Mississippi," he said. "You are not experienced sailors; and I want to impress upon you the need of instant obedience to your captain. Take no advantage of Captain Marat's good nature and your unusual relation to him."

"Aye, aye, Sir," said Ray, saluting.

A tug came puffing down the canal, two schooners in tow. Mr. Blaisdell stepped to the quay and threw off the mooring ropes. Wayne sprang to the bow with Captain Marat, and threw the tow-line to the hind-most of the two towed vessels; and the *Mercier* swung into the moving line of ocean-bound wind-jammers.

"Don't forget — we'll call at Biloxi and send you a line," called Wayne to Mr. Blaisdell.

"Regards to Mr. Maclay — and to Mr. Lamartine," shouted the boys.

"Aye, aye," called back Mr. Blaisdell. "*Bon voyage!*"

Before eleven o'clock the procession passed West End, with its cupola-topped pavilion, band stand, and other amusement structures, and the broad Lake Pontchartrain received our voyagers. A dead calm made the sails useless, and they were allowed to sleep on, tucked under the gaskets. The tug drew its burden of vessels well out on the lake before abandoning them, and then puffed back to the mouth of the canal.

Soon, smoke and a rattle of pans came from the little galley, and a black head showed through the window.

"Rufe's starting something," announced Phil Conger.

"Hey?" said Ray. Two bounds, and he had his head in at the galley window. "Say, Rufe, I hope you're used to having *real* eats-importers round you."

"Say," grinned Rufe, exhibiting an enormous, spanking-new stew-pan, "who is it buy dis heah?"

"Why —" faltered Ray, in fear lest he had made a bad beginning with the ship's cook. "Why, I guess I'm guilty."

"Wall," returned Rufe, his eye sparkling with the shining pan, "you is jes' aftah Mah heart. Dat pan is jes' mah size. I ain' got no use roun' me fo' no pickaninnies — white er black — as has got stummicks like pecking, yaller canary-birds. Ef I fin' you-all is dat kin'! — when we goes through de rail-road bridge, I is guine t' climb de mast and jump on de bridge and fut right back fo' New O'leans — dat w'at I am."

Rufe had been loaned to the voyagers by Mr. Charles

Lamartine; to act as cook, and because it seemed desirable to have in the party at least one who knew the lad, Julian, in search of whom they were making voyage. The announcement of the arrangement had caused Rufe fairly to bubble over with pleasure.

“ I guine be de fust to see mah li’le marster agin! An’ I guine to jump him on mah knee some more. You say he seventeen now. Dat ain’ guine make no diff’ence — I’d know ’im if he was seventy! An’ dat las’ day I see ’im, he was only six. He was de gen’l, an’ I was his whole army; an’ we charge de enemy, an’ kill um off, ebbery one.”

The tears stood in Rufe’s eyes, as he told over his and “ li’le marster Jul’an’s ” old pranks.

According to Captain Marat, old Pedro Lamartine, had he lived, was to have sailed the *Mercier* back down the Florida coast to a certain small, uninhabited island, some way below Naples; there to meet the shell-laden *Miguel*, with the darky, Loyo, on board. The meeting at the rendezvous had been set for a time on or about May 31st. Owing to the death of Pedro Lamartine, this meeting had failed.

There had been a former occasion, when old Pedro had been detained; and Loyo, per instructions, had sailed on to Punta Rassa and sent a telegram of inquiry, which Jean Marat himself had answered — in old Pedro’s absence. But this time no word had come from Loyo.

“ Maybe Loyo is dead, too,” suggested Robert.

"Id ees nod impossible," admitted Marat. "Bud I theenk Loyo now wait for thee nex' time to meet; thad ees about thee twelve of July."

It was to the chance of this meeting that the *Mercier* now sailed.

The voyagers were just come to the end of the noon meal, which had been spread on a table set on deck, since the cabin was too hot and stuffy for other use than that of a store-room. Leslie Dunn suggested to Wayne that they go down into their trunks for the binoculars. The cabin had not been entered since coming aboard this day; so Wayne produced the key, unlocked the scuttle, and the boys went into the airless place. The spectacle set them aghast.

"Great Cæsar!" began Wayne. "Who could have done that!"

The four trunks stood agape, contents scattered on the floor — a whirlwind couldn't have done a better job of havoc.

"Here, Scouts!" called Wayne, his head out of the scuttle.

Every one came to look, and be equally astounded. It was found where a window had been forced. And the condition of Pedro's bunk led Wayne to the finding evidence of some one having been at the secret drawer.

"Some one else knew about that," declared he, "and was here last night. Do you think it was Loyo?" He directed his eyes on Jean Marat.

"No, I donot believe," said Marat. "Loyo would come to me if he come back; I sure of that."

"Then," said Wayne, "somebody else found out about the secret drawer, and was after what was in it. Do you think it could be one of your crew?"

Jean Marat shook his head. "No. He would not wait all these weeks to break in these place. It was some one who have jus' come to New Orleans."

"Then," pursued Wayne, "it must be some one from the pearl banks, who found out something about the treasure and all from Loyo.—Glad I didn't leave those papers in the cabin. Perhaps something has happened to Loyo; and it would explain why you have not heard from him."

Marat nodded. "That w'at I be 'fraid for for some time."

Bert Hill interrupted the discussion to report the appearance of patches of ripples on the smooth surface of the lake, come to herald the wished-for breeze.

Marat spread the boys about to cast off the gaskets, and man the halliards and sheets.

"Now, up with thee jib!" he called.

The jib bellied in the light breeze. The mainsail and foresail followed, and the schooner answered to Marat's touch on the wheel; and after a time, a wake astern showed that the *Mercier* was in her paces again.

It was later, Wayne Scott and Robert Murtry leaned

together on the port bow rail, trying to glimpse land ahead.

“ Say, Wayne,” began Robert, “ if something has happened to that black Loyo, do you think we’ll be likely to meet the *Miguel*? ”

“ Well, Slicky,” returned Wayne, “ I’ve just been talking with Captain Marat about that. He thinks that we will. It looks as if some of those fellows down there (wherever the place is that the pearls are fished) had found out, some way, about that secret drawer, and sent somebody to rifle it; and they found somebody else had beat them to it; and of course they suspect us. Well, they very likely still want the information they expected to find, and likely saw us start, and suspect where we’re going; and whoever came up here will take the train back and get to the *Miguel*; and they’ll wait for us, hoping to get this information from us some way. That’s how we have figured it out.”

“ I suppose, then,” ventured Robert, “ that they thought there was something in that drawer to tell them where the treasure is hid.”

“ Yes,” agreed Wayne, “ and that would go to show, too, that they have not found that out from Loyo.—Something’s sure happened down there.”

The breeze had continued to freshen, relieving, in some measure, the sultriness that was so hard on the unacclimated boys; and it put increasing speed into the *Mer-*

cier. The afternoon was far gone when the low marshes began to show ahead; and the schooner was soon within hailing distance of the railroad bridge. The fog-horn was put into the hand of the strong-lunged Phil Conger, who blew an ear-splitting blast.

“ Say, Phil,” said Ray, his face showing alarm, “ that’s the only fog-horn we’ve got on the ship — may need it again.”

The bridge-tender had answered, and the span swung slowly open. The *Mercier* passed through, soon well into the Rigolets, a crooked channel that meandered through the marsh, to join Lake Pontchartrain to Lake Borgne, which in turn opened into Mississippi Sound, and so into the Gulf of Mexico.

The schooner was still far short of the exit from the Rigolets, and the sun still an hour above the western horizon of marsh-grass, when the breeze let down. The boys’ faces fell as they looked out over the miles on miles of lonely, cheerless marsh, to which they would have preferred the open sea, if they must be becalmed.

But there showed one object to give relief to this worse than desert. A single sentinel stood guard at this half-way point of the channel, in the shape of an old fort. Opposite this rampart, our voyagers let down the anchor. To relieve the tedium till another breeze should release them, the boys were encouraged to make a visit to the fort. Both boats were unlashd and set into the sluggish water; and soon the boys were within the walls, inspect-

ing the old guns, walking upon the parapets, and exploring the dark cells below; till twilight sent them back to the schooner and supper, which was interrupted with many slaps on the face, angry beating of the air and petulant expressions of annoyance, notwithstanding the smudge with which the grinning Rufe sought to envelop the table.

“ Say, Ray,” finally came from Phil. “ What are you fanning the air so much for? ”

“ Oh,” returned Ray, “ I’m just leading the orchestra — hear ’em sing? — But I don’t need any help — what are you shaking your baton for? ”

There was no room for table manners, pestered as the diners were by the increasing hordes of mosquitoes; and most threw down their knives and forks and abandoned the table, half satisfied.

“ Just look at the clouds of them in the marsh-grass,” cried Charlie Manners. “ A fellow wouldn’t live an hour if he was thrown in there.”

The boys were soon driven to the protection of their cheese-cloth mosquito-bars, which they set up on deck, edges tucked under blankets, two boys under each.

CHAPTER V

A TASTE OF SALT WATER — NEWS OF THE SPY

THE newly risen sun sent long, spiky shadows of the schooner's masts across the marsh, when Wayne, already abroad, and conversing with Jean Marat, turned to the white, cheese-cloth, box-like affairs, from which came sounds of various sorts common to sleepers.

"Pile out, Scouts! Pile out! A breeze is coming."

"Eh?" came the drowsy and puzzled inquiry from one white inclosure. "What's the matter?" came from another.

The edge of a third bar lifted, and out came Ray's head. "I was just dreaming," he said. "Two hundred millions of mosquitoes stuck their bills into me and flew off to the top of a ten mile high mountain, and dropped me into an eagle's nest; and the eagle came flying along and said, 'Pile out! a breeze is coming.'"

Rufe stuck his grinning face out of the galley. "How high dat mountain was, did you say?"

"Ten miles," repeated Ray.

"Ho-wee!" laughed Rufe. "I reckon it a good thing you wuk up 'fore you piled out."

The glaring sun had not gone high in its morning

climb, when the *Mercier* passed the buildings at Look-out, and her cutwater disturbed the waters of Lake Borgne. The boys were grouped in the bow, finding pleasure in the new objects that opened to view, as the *Mercier* sped on under a strong breeze.

"Ah, Mr. Wayne!" called Captain Marat from the wheel. And as Wayne hurried up, he added, "Ged your boys aft."

"All hands aft!" called Wayne; and there was a scramble.

Beckoning to Robert, Jean Marat gave him the tiller. "Hold her south-east by east — just so. Now," turning to the others, "who do you want for mate?"

"Oh, there isn't any pick," spoke up Ray. "Wayne is the only one of us who can boss — he's been at it two years."

"Ver' good," said Marat. "Wayne, you are my mate. Now we pick our watches. Ray Reid, you step to starboard. Your turn, mate."

"I take Slicky. You're in my watch," said Wayne, turning to the wheel.

"Aye, aye, sir," said Robert, his eye on the compass.

"That is right," said Captain Marat, smiling approval. "Charlie Manner'."

"Leslie Dunn," said Wayne, "step to port."

"Philip Conger," said Captain Marat.

"Bert Hill," said Wayne.

"Joe Hunt is ver' handy with the tools," explained

Captain Marat. "He will be carpenter, and will help in any wadch w'en it is need."

Then came a short lesson in the names of the various parts of the schooner's rig, and in the way to execute certain orders.

When the light-house was passed, the course was changed to northeast by east. At noon, the *Mercier* was plunging forward a little over half way down Mississippi Sound.

Captain Marat struck the bell—"Ding ding—ding ding—ding ding—ding ding." Eight bells. "Now thee starboard wadch go on duty. Ray, go on lookout—Charlie, take the wheel. Hol' her east by northeast."

At four, Phil Conger, who had relieved Charlie at the wheel, struck eight bells, and the port watch went on duty—four to six.

"Slicky on the lookout," said Wayne—"Bert, take the wheel."

Leslie had just relieved Bert at the wheel, at two strokes of the bell, when the *Mercier* passed just within a small island off Biloxi.

"These will be the bes' place," said Captain Marat to Wayne.

"Slicky! Bert!" called Wayne. "Down with the jib!"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Man the fore halliards!"

"Now Leslie, heave to!—over with the wheel!"

“Aye, aye, sir.”

The sails flapped, as the schooner pointed into the wind.

“Let go the fore halliards!” Wayne hauled in on the sheet. “Main halliards! Let go! Now over with the anchor!”

Slicky and Bert sprang forward and threw the anchor, while Joe helped Wayne furl the mainsail. Soon all was snug, and Captain Marat smiling.

“That was ver’ good — ver’ good. I could not have believe’ you learn soqueeck.”

“Say, Captain Marat,” said Ray, saluting. “Mr. Wayne Scott, here, is some mate, isn’t he? You ought to have seen him two years ago, the day he became our leader. He’d told us he didn’t like to boss people. And one day, a fellow who was anxious to be leader, took us out and ordered us around like a bunch of tin soldiers. He managed to set fire to a cow-shed, and then didn’t know what to do — right. Then Wayne got excited — in that unexcited kind of way, you know — and took charge; and ordered us around like a circus man training horses — kept us all humping; and first think you know, the big blaze was all out and hardly any harm done.”

Captain Marat laughed. “Yes, I begin to fin’ heem out. He talk ver’ little and theenk ver’ much; and w’en it is something to do, he wake up and know how to do it, queeck.”

The boys stood casting curious eyes across the choppy

half mile or so of bay, to the light-house and buildings of Biloxi. Captain Marat leaned on the rail beside the house, looking into the water. Presently he called to the others.

"I know you like ver' much the oyster," he said. "In one hour you can get so many you want."

Looking into the clear water, the boys made out a rough matting of mottled gray.

"Now, Phil," said Ray, "get out your hook and line — Rufe'll give you a slice of bacon for bait — and maybe we'll have an oyster supper."

"Some kinds of fish might bite at your tongue," returned Phil.

"Maybe I don't know *your bait*," said Ray. "Say, Captain, you ought to see Phil's fins and steering-gear wiggle when his eye gets on my flap-jacks and bread pudding. He'll tell you I'm some chef."

Rufe was got to hold back supper; and when the tide had ebbed enough, Wayne and Robert slipped overboard, clad in old shoes and trousers. Then came a shower of oysters on the schooner's deck.

After a time, Rufe sized up the pile. "Dar's nigh onto four bushel," he said. "I reckon, boys, dat enough."

The darky brought oyster-knives from the galley; and showed the boys how to break off an edge of shell, insert the knife, and cut loose the tidbit. He picked up a pep-

per-shaker. "An' den you shakes de pepper, an'— smack you' lips, like dat." (The — means he did it).

The whole operation was done so quick, it was like sleight-of-hand. The boys followed Rufe's example, though with less nimbleness; and it was not long till a bushel of the bivalves had gone the way.

"An' now," said Rufe, "ef you-all'll jes' climb de mas', stan' on yo' head, an' settle yo' ballas' a li'le; I'll make you de bes'est oystah stew you eveh got yo' stum-micks roun'."

Nine white bowls were ranged round the table, each companioned by some one in some sort of sailor dress. The bowls were not yet empty, when black Rufe edged up to Phil Conger to deliver a sly nudge and wink; and Phil slipped to the galley and peeked in to the round nickel clock, skipped back down the starboard alleyway to the stern, and struck six bells. It was Phil's watch, and he'd forgotten.

"Too bad, Phil," observed Ray, when Phil got back to his stew. "Next time we'll have to rig up a line from the bell to the table."

It being a little late for a visit to town, Captain Marat hied the boys off in the boats to the little island, for a first swim in salt water. Soon there were many eyes smarting of the salt, and an unwonted spitting.

"Say, fellows," said Ray, making a wry face. "When I go home again I'll bet it'll be in a herring-keg."

Soon Bert Hill and Charlie Manners were observed in shallow water, making unrecompensed grabs at something in the bottom.

"Crabs," said Wayne.

Then the whole company joined in the pursuit, moving down the beach; but no one made a strike. Finally Ray straightened himself, his face showing disgust.

"Say," he began, "those side-steppers haven't any more accommodation than a base ball umpire. At first it looked as if they thought it was a foot race and they'd just get out of the way; but I saw that last fellow laughing at me."

Then he followed Leslie's eyes to something down the beach. "Look at that giant frying-pan sliding for the water," he said. "And it's going handle first."

"I'll bet that's a loggerhead turtle," said Wayne. "You remember those we saw in the French Market?"

And then Phil claimed all attention, as he limped out of the water. "Ow! Ow!" he howled. "I'm stung."

And eight pairs of eyes inspected his foot — no wound visible.

"Aw," mocked Ray. "Just a game to show off your purty little tootsie wootsies."

"I tell you it hurts!" exploded Phil. "You can't see every hurt. And I saw it — looked like a thin turtle, and had a long tail."

"And thereby hangs a stinger," misquoted Ray.

Dusk sent the boats back to the *Mercier*; and while

Bert pulled aloft the white anchor-light, the boys recounted their adventures, to the loud guffaws of Rufe.

"An' you-all didn' ketch nary crab?" he grinned.

"Aw, we were just making believe," said Ray; "just to scare 'em."

"I show you nex' time how to get those crab," smiled Captain Marat.

Then came the story of Phil's hurt.

"It was the stingaree," explained Jean Marat.

Light broke in Phil's face. "I might have known that was the name of the thing," he said. "Stingaree!"

"Then I'm going to name these things stingarissees," Ray avowed, slapping his neck viciously.

"Most on dem's san'-flies — de li'le ones," explained Rufe.

"And what are these big fellows?" said Ray.

"O dem's gallinippers," said Rufe.

"Gall'nippers," sniffed Ray. "Do they take me for a gal? Tell 'em different, Rufe."

Rufe exploded immoderately. "O dat ain' de way — haw! haw! — Dey's de gals deyselves!" And the jolly black turned to the galley, where, setting things to rights, he continued alternately to roar and snicker over his joke for some time, under the silent observation of the mosquito-pestered Ray.

Darkness fell in the short space that characterizes the more tropic regions, and the boys retreated to the protection of their mosquito bars.

They were up ahead of the sun in the morning; and while Rufe's biscuits browned in the oven, they made dives into the stifling cabin for suitable raiment for their trip to shore. Rufe, alone, stayed on board; and as the boats swung off, he leaned on the rail to admonish the crews to be back for dinner at one, sharp.

At the post office news awaited them in the way of a letter from Mr. Blaisdell. Our voyagers grouped themselves in a corner; and — interrupted now and then with such ejaculations as: "That's the fellow that broke into the cabin!" and "Looks like something doing" — Wayne read the following: —

Dear Friends —

I have now to tell you of a circumstance very apparently bearing on the purposes of your voyage. When you had finally passed out of view down the basin, I turned to find a strange chap at my elbow, evidently wanting a word with me. "You' frien's in the schooner — they sail far?" he asked. — "Some distance, perhaps," I told him. — "They go some special places?" he asked again. The man's interest seemed to have some design. — "Perhaps," I answered. "Why do you ask?" He appeared disconcerted; and it occurred to me that given a little patronage, he might reveal something of the source of his concern. So I added, offering as much information as I felt could do no harm — "They are going down the Florida coast to meet friends." — "Ah!" he said, surprised into a stronger expression of his interest. "They go to meet Loyo?" He hung eagerly for the answer. — "You know Loyo?" I asked in turn; and he hesitated, doubtful how he ought to answer. I con-

tinued, "You come from Loyo?" He hesitated a moment again; and then he said—"Yes. Do they have paper for Loyo?" Now his ardency had got the better of his caution.—"Yes, I think they have perhaps," I said. With that he seemed to have got all he wanted, and was eager to be off; and parried all my efforts to probe further, with evasions and bows. And at last he tore himself away, and tripped off.

He was a little man, a type of what is called the "Dago" sailor; and shrewd and cringing—should you meet up with him.

Now, lads, during this rencounter, I did as fast thinking as can be expected of a grizzled old head; and it seemed to me that the information I gave might serve your turn better than silence. If he really came from Loyo, it will prepare Loyo to meet you. If he does not come from him—you will, as well, be likely to meet those who are in some way linked with him. And so you will be in the way of making as much as you can of a greater or less opportunity to seize guidance to the unknown and mysterious goal of your voyage.

Again I counsel you—be not rash. And *bon voyage!*

MARVIN BLAISDELL.

"Whew!" whistled Ray. "The plot deepens."

"What do you think?" said Wayne, turning to Jean Marat.

"Thad man do not come from Loyo," insisted Marat, and there was no doubt in his manner.

Wayne added a line to a letter already prepared for Mr. Blaisdell, and deposited it. As the boys moved up and down the interesting streets, canopied with moss-hung great-oaks, Wayne kept in the wake—very pen-

sive, and entirely unconscious of the good-natured inuendoes his comrades directed back to him from time to time. His mind was over busy with sorting, and framing, and building on the mystery, to the solution of which Mr. Blaisdell's letter had given more or less matched material.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEVIL-FISH — SQUALLS, CALMS, AND SPONGING

ON the morrow, a favorable breeze coaxed aloft the sails of the *Mercier* before five o'clock. During the summer months, Captain Marat said, the winds were none too certain; it was mostly "a feast or a famine," and wise sailors took advantage of anything between. Then came two days of watch on and off, the boys each getting a taste of the wheel, and large measure of gazing on the panorama of distant shore, the sporting of porpoises, the fishing activities of generous-billed pelicans. Mobile Bay was allowed to slip by; and the *Mercier* spurned all invitations to hang up, till the forts guarding the gate to Pensacola Bay hove in view.

The anchor found the bottom off the town, amidst a whole city of ships. A cosmopolitan city it was, for here nearly all countries were represented, with vessels of every grade of tonnage, and of every approved pattern of rigging. That forest of spars delighted the young voyagers, and their heads swam with the effort to follow intelligently Jean Marat's technical lecture on a few of the nearest.

We shall not follow the boys in their visits ashore: to the town, the fort, and the navy yard; more important

things — at sea — are developing. So passed some days. The schooner *Mercier* lay becalmed on the smooth sea; the unbroken ring of horizon all about was but clear sky and clear sea. A whole day and night had passed thus. Even Ray pulled a long face, and refused to look abroad on the monotonous plain. The *Mercier* rose and fell ever so gently in the otherwise imperceptible swell. The bell tolled the time each half hour; and the ever more insistent mosquitoes sang, and fed by short spells on the tender necks of the crew.

At eight bells, noon, Captain Marat, to divert the boys, got out his sextant and took the observation, and on the chart marked the location — lat. $29^{\circ} 52'$ north; long. $85^{\circ} 56'$ west.

“On the chart,” observed Wayne, “it doesn’t look so far from shore.”

“No,” said Captain Marat, “only thirty mile. And Cape San Blas nearly alway rough.”

“What’s that commotion in the water over there?” said Leslie, looking off eastward.

“Ah!” said Captain Marat, stepping to the starboard rail, “a school of feesh — I guess thee devil-feesh after them. Ged thee harpoon.”

Robert sprang down into the cabin and brought out the weapon. Jean Marat made the long rope fast to the rigging, climbed on the rail; and, harpoon in hand, watched the ruffled water coming closer. Then the boys made out the long, radiating ropes of tentacles. And the

next instant the harpoon flashed into the midst. The water foamed — the stick was seen to fly over the surface as the rope payed out; and the next moment there was a snap, and the section of rope flew back, striking the deck with much force.

“He’s gone!” said Ray. “I hope he’ll have joy of that harpoon.”

“He was ver’ big one,” explained Marat.

“Looks as if that devil-fish whistled up a breeze,” said Robert.

Catspaws showed here and there.

“Ray,” said Captain Marat, “haul in on thee jib sheet till she come roun’— So, thad is good. Now help Charlie trim thee main sheet, and then thee fore. Phil, hol’ her southeas’ and by eas’, half eas’.”

By the time the port watch (Wayne’s) went on for the first dog-watch — at eight bells (four o’clock), the *Mercier* was making a good six knots; and there was a lively sea on. The mosquitoes were less insistent, not caring to brave the wind; and altogether, cheer shone out from bowsprit to rudder. At nine, Cape San Blas Light showed to the north. At six bells (eleven o’clock) Wayne called Captain Marat; Cape St. George light shone to the southeast.

“Ah, now we soon be in the West Pass,” said Marat.

When the rest of the starboard watch was called, they were told they were in Apalachicola Bay; and lights of the town beckoned to the anchorage.

On the second morning after, the *Mercier* ambled along up St. George's Sound, under a southerly breeze, puffy and threatening to go out, like a lamp drained of oil. The schooner passed Dog Island Reef a little after noon, and set her nose out into the Gulf. Then soon, a black blanket of cloud loomed up in the northwest.

"A beeg squall ees coming," said Captain Marat. "Over weeth the anchor, and take in sail. Make your-se'f queeck!"

Everything was barely got snug when the wind bore down. In a few moments the bowsprit was invisible from the house, so dark had it become. And the schooner plunged like a frantic horse; and the wind whistled fiercely in the rigging. Though the crew stood closely grouped, each must shout to make himself heard by the others.

"Eef the anchor should geeve," called Captain Marat, "hang tight to sometheeng."

Wayne and Robert got down on hands and knees and crawled slowly, and with immense difficulty, to the bow, where they watched the powerful wrenching on the anchor-chain, dreading each moment to see it parted from the anchor. Spray whipped their faces with stinging lashes, and went hissing down the deck. A bucking broncho was the only analogy Wayne could find for the wild antics of the *Mercier* now, lashed by the whip of this fierce squall.

And then, as if considering that ten minutes of such

punishment was all that even a staunch schooner could be expected to bear, the storm withdrew its fury. The last of the black clouds scampered seaward; the sun came out; and, except for the billows that continued to roll, and a normal breeze that came on the tail of the storm, all was tranquil.

When the anchor came up, there showed a slight bend in one arm.

"Ah! eet was hard pull," said Marat.

In a couple of hours, now, the land had dipped below the horizon behind; and Robert, at the wheel, held the fore and aft mark on east by south. Before going off the second dog-watch, at eight, Ray set the side-lights.

When the port watch was called, at four in the morning, Captain Marat informed his mate (Wayne) that the wind had considerably slackened soon after two bells (one o'clock), but that land should be visible soon, whereupon he should change his course to south southeast. Wayne took the wheel, Robert went forward on lookout, and Bert and Leslie conversed in the waist.

Wayne would let his eye rest a moment on the compass, where it swung in the binnacle, illumined by its lamp; and then his eye would travel to the gently pulling sails, standing well out to port under the fair but mild breeze; and he would in turn look out over Robert's head, where he paced the bows, and note the growing light in the east. The ripples tinkled their soft tune along the schooner's sides. But Wayne heard neither this nor the

murmuring of Leslie's and Bert's voices amidship. His mind was deep in conjectures bearing on the ultimate goal of the voyage. He asked himself such questions as these: Why had not Loyo himself come to New Orleans, or sent a telegram of inquiry relative to his master's failure to meet him at the rendezvous? Or if, as was feared, something had happened to Loyo, what was the motive of that chap who had broken into the *Mercier's* cabin, evidently in search of the papers in the secret drawer? Was he friendly to Loyo's and Julian Lamartine's interests? If friendly, why had he not communicated with Jean Marat, as Loyo would have done? If unfriendly, what sort of crew was to be met with at this rendezvous down the coast? And where was this mysterious place, where bided the lost Julian Lamartine? Wayne in time began to squirm with impatience for answers to these riddles. Finally there came an interruption to his painful revery.

"Land-ho!" called Robert, perched on the fore-cross-trees, to which he had climbed.

Wayne awoke to the realization that it was broad day; and he blew out the binnacle light. Leslie and Bert had already taken down the red and green side-lights.

It was near another hour before those on deck made out the line of land below the now some time risen sun. Wayne changed the course to south southeast and relinquished the wheel to Leslie.

The schooner was making barely three knots, so Cap-

tain Marat said, and it was going to three o'clock in the next port watch, when Cedar Keys was sighted. Out of the northwest, a squall of considerable liveliness came down and carried the *Mercier* at a canty pace inside Sea Horse Key Light, and left her almost becalmed a considerable way to the southeast, and a few miles off shore.

It was in the first dog-watch; Wayne, Robert, Leslie, and Bert were observing some spongers, a group of small vessels near a mile away. Captain Marat was explaining how they tore the sponges from the sea bottom with their long pairs of rakes, joined scissors-like. Then came a leaning over the rail to spy for sponges in the clear water — the bottom quite visible thirty-five feet below the barely moving schooner. Nary a sponge could the boys see, or said so.

Marat laughed. "I show you," he offered. "Now, see there, thad black roun'—like a stone. Thad thee sponge."

"Think of it!" said Bert. "Sponges, free — only to pick them."

"Let's try," said Wayne.

In fifteen minutes, Joe had rigged a bunch of grappling-hooks on the end of a small rope, and the hooks fastened as well to the end of a long rod. The free end of rope, fast to the fore rigging, Wayne took a position on the rail, beside the cabin, and thrust the pole into the deep, till the hooks hovered just over the sea floor.

Presently, slowly there came into view a round black

stone. Thrust! went the pole, and the hooks clawed into it. They tore out. Two more failures. And then the fourth black ball clung to the hooks. Gingerly, Wayne pulled in. The round black thing came aboard, less resembling a sponge than a large wet ball of black yarn. This new kind of fishing ceased only when a round dozen lay on the deck.

The captain, who for a time had been using his binoculars on some object off the port bow, called the boys.

"You can not see ver' good," he said, "but I explain."

And then he told them that what they saw so imperfectly were some sponge-corrals, that lay in shallows, between a small island (key) and the mainland. These corrals were constructed of stakes set close together; and the new-plucked sponges were dumped within. At flow of tide they were covered by the sea; at the ebb they lay high and dry, beaten by the sun. This alternate wetting and drying rotted off the black envelope in a few days.

Wayne and Joe seized on the hint, and gathered the catch of sponges into an improvised corral on deck. And for the next few days the boys made them their especial care, wetting them every evening and morning with buckets of sea water. In time they were able to tear off the black covering, and the sponges came to light, and were then hung in the sun to bleach.

Times held down by calms, times kicked along lively by squalls, it was July third before the crew of the *Mercier* lay up for a real bit of play.

CHAPTER VII

CRABS — NEWS OF THE *MIGUEL*

THE *Mercier* set her bowsprit through Boca Grande Pass at six bells of the morning watch, sailed down within Charlotte Harbor, and at two o'clock dropped her anchor off the white sand beach, backed by the interminable line of graceful palms.

There was now to be several days of uninterrupted play, and such bits of Scouting as the boys saw fit to practice.

The grinning Rufe squatted on the deck, in the shade of his galley, and turned his eyes on Ray.

"I reckon we-all's guine t' have a mess o' crabs foh suppah, ain' we?" he said.

"Say, Rufe," returned Ray, "we're going to have that kettle of crabs if I have to build a corral around them — if I can only get to shore ahead of Phil, here. When he gets after those stingarees — well —"

"Aw, stingaree yourself," pouted Phil. "You didn't even catch that much, that day."

Soon the two boats were pulled up on the beach of the key, and the whole ship's crew were on the white stretch of sand. Under the direction of Jean Marat, each of

the boys got himself a stick and whittled it to a sharp point.

"Now," said the smiling Marat, "thee firs' one who catch a crab weel egsplain to the res' how he do it."

Then the boys scattered along the hot, glaring beach, watched by Marat and Rufe. The stick spears began confidently to stab at things in the shallow water, but always came up again empty; to the astonishment of the spearsmen, who made most rueful faces.

The sight was too much for black Rufe, and he rolled in the sand, holding his sides and shouting to keep from bursting with the laughter that accumulated in him faster than he could vent it.

Ray was the first to take cognizance; and he poised his wee spear in his fingers, as he looked on the convulsed darky, put on his serious face, and said to his nearest comrades:

"Say, fellows, look at Rufe. He's getting something — religion maybe."

And that brought fresh explosions from the sea-cook.

But there were two of the boys, each of whom, after a couple of jabs, stopped to analyze his failure — in this art of spitting crabs on a stick; with the result that finally, first Joe, and then Wayne, exhibited a crab on the end of his spear. A shout from Phil brought the fishers all together.

"Ah," said Jean Marat, "I see you two have fin' out thee tr-rick. Now, Joe, you tell how you do eet."

“Well,” began Joe, thrusting his spear on a slant in the water, “you see, the stick looks like it makes a bend forward just where it enters the water, and the end of the stick in the sand bottom seems to be forward of the spot to which the stick actually points. So a crab on the bottom really looks to be farther away from you than he really is, and you have to aim this side of where he seems to be in order to get him.”

“Thad is ver’ good,” said Captain Marat. “Thee science men say id ees thee refraction of thee light at the top of thee water.”

“We ought to have known that,” offered Charlie Manners; “we had that in high school.”

“I tells you how it look to me,” interposed Rufe. “It look to me like dey’s moh science den crabs in dis heah speculation. Ef you-all’s a-guine to eat crabs foh sup-pah, an’ ef de sticks have to go crooked befo’ dey gits de crabs, you-all bes’ git crooked sticks an’ go after um.”

But for all that Rufe contented himself with a straight stick, and joined in the pursuit; and the pail was soon filled.

Robert and Leslie rowed Rufe, with the crabs, back to the schooner, returning to rejoin the rest of the boys, who scampered through the narrow grove of tall palms to the Gulf side of the key; where for some time they rolled in the surf, and collected many wonderful shells, and marvelled at the many samples of star-fish that studded the wide beach.

"Listen, fellows!" said Charlie at last.

The boys then heard the croaking of the fog-horn, coming through the palms.

"Into your pajamas!" said Ray. "That's Rufe yelling — 'Cr-a-abs!'"

The smoking dish in the center of the table soon began to melt of its heap, and the little piles of broken bits of claws grew beside the plates.

"Tomorrow's Independence Day, fellows," said Wayne. "How are we going to celebrate?"

"And we've got nary a firecracker," wailed Phil.

"There's a town, according to the chart," said Wayne, "about seven or eight miles down the big island. Do you think, Captain Marat, we could get some firecrackers there?"

"I theenk maybe," encouraged Marat.

Then came the suggestion that one watch go down there in the morning in one of the boats, and take a wireless set, for practice.

Day had not yet dawned, when — "Bang!" A gunshot jolted the loose things on the deck. The boys poked out their heads from the bars, to see Jean Marat smiling, his smoking shotgun in his hands. Both barrels had gone off.

"I thought that was Rufe — getting something," observed Ray.

The sun was not yet up, when the port watch climbed into one of the boats, with a suit-case holding a wireless

set, and pointed the bow southeastward. It was slow-going, and it was near eight o'clock when Wayne and crew found their bunches of firecrackers, in a general store. The clerk was the proprietor's son, a talkative chap.

"That's your schooner over by the key, isn't it?" said the boy.

"Yes," said Wayne.

"What's her name?"

"The *Mercier*."

"We don't see many schooners, inside here," the boy ran on. "There was one here last month — named the *Miguel*." (The name brought the boys sharp up with eager interest). "The captain was a Dago — was looking for cartridges for Mauser rifles. We don't have any. Nobody uses them kind o' rifles here. I started to ask one of the men where they was from, but the captain pulled him away. He was a grouchy cuss that captain was."

"Was there a black man with them?" questioned Wayne.

"No," said the boy. "I rowed out to take a look at the schooner, but I didn't see no nigger on her. I like to sail. I'm goin' to buy a sloop that's up at Fort Myers. She's a dandy big sail, brass letters —"

"When was it they were here?" asked Wayne.

"Oh, about three weeks ago."

"Which way did they sail?"

“Oh, they went back south. Dad told the captain he didn’t think he could get them Mauser ca’ttridges this side o’ New Orleans, an’ the captain just nodded his head like he thought so too. We’re going to have some fireworks here tonight. Say, I can sell you some o’ them rockets cheap — an’ some pin-wheels.”

Wayne and Robert, full of the news, went to join Bert and Leslie, out front; where they found them watching some of the town’s boys exploding firecrackers in an old gasoline can.

“What do you think they wanted with those cartridges?” finally queried Leslie.

Wayne shook his head. “Don’t know,” he said. “We’re on the track, I guess. And Loyo wasn’t along.” And he fell to musing over the thing.

Within the hour, they had the boat on the beach, a mile up shore from the town; and they set up the aerial wires between trees.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FOURTH — TURTLE-TURNING

ON board the *Mercier*, preparations went forward. First, up went the Stars and Stripes to the main-mast-head; the patrol pennant was hauled to the fore-mast-head; and Ray and Phil scouted out every bit of red, white, or blue rag on board, and stuck it to the jib-stay. Then while Ray, Charlie, and Phil prepared to swab the decks, Captain Marat threw into the second ship's boat a net, and called Joe Hunt to row him.

"I theenk, Rufe," said Marat, "maybe we have some mullet for dinner."

Rufe came out from his galley, where the pans had already taken on a shine like mirrors.

"Bake' mullet," grinned he. "Dat jes' one o' mah speshalities, captain; an' ah's got jes' de stuff foh de dressin'."

Joe rowed quietly; and Marat in the bow, stood gazing into the clear water. Presently he began to gather the net on his right arm, holding a coil of rope in the left hand. The boys on board gathered at the rail to watch. Then suddenly, the captain gave a swing to the net, and it spread over the water, bell-shaped, and sank. By the

rope, he soon had it into the boat, and the flapping things told of his success. Two more throws, and a plenteous mess of mullet was brought in to black Rufe.

“Dis is whah I shines, boys,” he enthused. “Dis is whah I shines. Jes’ you wait, an’ ef I doan make yo’ mouths water!”

When the boys had thrown the last bucketful over the decks, Jean Marat exhibited his cast-net, spreading it out to its bell shape. The edge was weighted with leads, and from all around small ropes converged, like spokes of a wheel, to the center, where they were bent to a single rope that passed up through a ring at the apex of the bell.

“You see,” explained Marat, “w’en I throw it out, it on thee rope, and thee side’ they come together like one spread, and come down over thee feesh; and then I pull bag, weeth the feesh in — thees-a-way.” And he pulled on the rope in demonstration.

“Gee,” observed Ray. “That would lasso a whole family, and the sisters-in-law.— Say, fellows,” on a sudden recollection, “it’s about time we’re setting up the wireless. The port watch might be calling.”

Using the flag and pennant halliards, it took not many minutes to swing the aerials between the mast-heads; and Ray, always quick, had the instruments in working order in no time. With the receiver clasped to his head, he moved the slide forward and back, intent on picking up the call. But it wasn’t till there had passed half an hour

of frequent visits to the instrument, that Ray finally got the flash of the call.

“There they are!” he said. And he flashed back, “I I.” And he called Charlie to take down what should come.

Ray called out the letters, as he got them in dashes and dots, and Charlie set them down — “M-i-g-u-e-l,” and so on. When it was completed, Charlie exhibited the message, as follows:

“*Miguel* here three weeks back. Loyo not along.”

Jean Marat took the paper in his fingers and read the words silently. He shook his head solemnly and repeated aloud — “‘Loyo not al-ong.’ Thad w’at I been ’fraid of. Sometheeng wrong weeth Loyo — seeck maybe.” He spoke as if he thought that last should be the most favorable construction. For he knew Loyo never failed to come with the *Miguel* when his master was absent.

The exchange of wireless messages continued for some time, each of the boys at either end trying his speed at sending and receiving. Rufe made frequent visits to express his wonder — qualified by much doubt of the verity of this “talkin’ sebben mile widout no wire tube.”

“Say,” he persisted, “you-all is jes’ a puttin’ on, to fool dis heah niggah. You ain’ sho’ nuff talkin’ wid dem port watchers.”

“Give us a message to send them,” offered Ray. “And then when they come, find out for yourself.”

“Jes’ you tell um,” began Rufe, “dat we has baked

mullet wid dressin' foh dinnah; an' to come soon's dey kin git dey-alls contraptions in de boat. Kin de wire — dat ain' no wire — hol' all dat, or is it gwine jes' fall in de bay?" And he grinned his doubts.

Joe flashed the message.

An hour and a half later, Wayne's boat had come within hailing distance, and black Rufe leaned over the *Mercier's* rail.

"Poart watch, ahoy!" he called. "Did you-all git mah message?"

"Baked mullet with dressing for dinner," called back Wayne, "and come as soon as we can get our contraptions in the boat."

"O-wee!" shouted Rufe. "Dat jes' w'at I sayed. Golly! but ain' dat wonderful! Dat sho nuff settles it. I nebber would a beliebed it."

After dinner, a few firecrackers were unbunched, and were soon snapping zealously over the water. Jean Marat brought out his armory. Besides the shot-gun, he had a pair of handsome rifles: a 32 repeater, and one of larger calibre.

"Now I show you w'at thees one can do," he said, patting the latter arm. "Take your glass, and look at thee piece of paper w'at I feex on one palm yesterday. Thad is aboud 450 yard'."

"Over a quarter of a mile," said Wayne.

"Jus' so," said Marat, adjusting the sights. "Now, do you see thad paper?"

“Yes,” said the boys, their eyes to the binoculars; and they watched the square bit of paper, so far away.

Jean Marat, standing free, put the rifle to his shoulder. In the next moment came the report; and the boys saw what seemed like a blot of ink suddenly appear about the center of the paper.

The astonishment was general.

“Now keep thee eyes on the paper till I say,” requested Marat.

And then, immediately following each of four reports, there appeared a blot near each of the four corners of the paper.

“Say,” said the astounded Ray. “Do you suppose you could miss if you tried hard enough?”

“Thees gun never mees,” said Jean Marat, again patting the rifle.

Rufe put into the boats some cooking utensils and eatables, and all the company went to the key. It was a gala afternoon, what with firing of crackers, target practice with the smaller rifle, tumbling in the surf, and spear- ing crabs for supper, and all. And then, after dark, came the whirring of the rockets over the bay, and the colored pin-wheels, and finally a trial at turtle-turning.

Wayne’s watch hunted up the outer beach, and the starboard watch went southward.

Wayne and his crew had trod the beach near three miles; it was nearing ten, and the moon was slowly moving down for its dip into the sea, when Robert’s sharp eye

spied something far ahead, and he darted forward. When the others came up, he had a green-turtle on its back. It measured seventeen inches across.

"Well," said Wayne, "we've got the dinner for tomorrow, even if the other fellows don't get anything."

So they took up the march back to the anchorage. The boys had never been in so attractive a situation. The moon laid a glistening track on the lightly disturbed water of the Gulf, and gave a pretty light to the surf as it rolled on the edge of the broad, white beach. On the other side, the tall palms appeared at once dignified and friendly; and the lower dried fans rustled — soothing; and the clear air was balmy, and redolent of flowers and the sea.

"Say," said Leslie, "I'd like to spend all the rest of the time right here."

The starboard watch had turned two loggerhead turtles; but they were set loose, to scamper turtle fashion into the sea; and the more edible green-turtle found his way into the kettle next day — to come out as one of Rufe's "speshialities."

Several days thus passed, before the boys were content to leave these pleasure-grounds. And then the sails went up, and no stop was made again till they were come to a place but eighty miles to the north of the spot where the two schooners of Pedro Lamartine were used to meet; and there remained nearly a week till the time when, in the usual order, Loyo should be on hand at the

rendezvous. If, indeed, Loyo should come, a thing which, Jean Marat confessed to Wayne, seemed very doubtful.

The *Mercier* had come to a little bay, whence the boys meant to penetrate the mainland, to get a taste of the scenes there, and to seek some sort of adventure with alligators; and that, Jean Marat assured them, would be no very difficult achievement.

It was Friday evening, two hours before sunset, when the anchor was dropped, above a mile off from shore, in the shallows. The next day was but just in its dawning, when the two boats, bearing all of the ship's company but Rufe, moved shore-ward on the incoming tide. They made for the mouth of a creek, and were soon moving between the hammock-fringed shores: first the tangled mangrove, then palms, oaks, magnolias, mattings of wild-grape vines. The boats cut through floating islands of water-lettuce, a bit of which Phil nearly choked on, before Marat could call a warning. For it has a rough surface, like a cow's tongue, and thereby an unhappy tendency to travel quickly toward the throat.

"Look how funny that log moves, over there," said Bert Hill. And he pointed to something having the look of two knots of a heavy log just topping the water.

"I theenk thad log sink ver' queeck," said Captain Marat. And in that moment it disappeared.

"It was the alligator," explained Marat.

They had not to go far till they discovered another,

lazing it on a piece of sand shore. This one, with apparent reluctance, made some strides and vanished in the water. Marat then took up his rifle; and when the boats turned a point, surprising another alligator basking on the shore, the report of the rifle came just as the saurian got to the water's edge. There was a few moments' violent commotion, and Mr. Alligator floated, belly up.

When they dragged him ashore, Marat measured him.

"Thad good size," he said. "Thirteen feet."

The alligators proved to be almost as plentiful as turtles; and two miles up Marat caught one in the pine woods, lassoing it, a small four-footer; which was finally freed, when the boys had witnessed sufficient examples of its vicious nature — snapping at sticks, and lashing about with its tail.

CHAPTER IX

THE MIGUEL SIGHTED — LAFITTE GOYA

HOW the boys came upon herds of deer; how Marat discovered signs of a wild turkey roost, and they returned before daylight and brought down a gobbler; and how Rufe turned him into a feast; and the fishing, and many another experience in the Florida wilds, might be here recorded. But with the nearness to the island rendezvous, and the time, Wayne, especially, began to experience impatience for the answers to the riddles that had so filled his mind since the beginning of the voyage. And it is doubtless equally so with the reader. So we will pass over those few days, and take up the legend with the *Mercier* some sixty miles to the south.

The voyagers had been off Naples at daylight; and now, after near fourteen hours under the mildest of breezes, the *Mercier* was keeping to her three knots, in a position seven or eight miles off shore, and pointing her bowsprit to a small palm key five miles distant. With the exception of Leslie (at the wheel — just striking five bells of the second dog-watch) the boys all clustered at the bows, eyes on the little island ahead. For that was the rendezvous, Jean Marat had told them.

Marat stretched out his arm toward the sun, fingers closed, thumb up; the lower edge of his hand on a line with the watery horizon, the tip of his thumb just touching the sun.

"In one hour thee sun go down," he said.

"Can we make it before dark, Captain?" said Ray.

"No," answered Marat. "But we have good moonlight to fin' thee anchorage."

"I don't see any schooner," said Ray. And he gazed intently through the binoculars.

"Well," said Phil, "she isn't due till tomorrow. What kind of glasses do you think you've got, you mutt?"

"Well I swan!" said Ray, feigning astonishment, while he inspected the binoculars. "I thought these were yours; and they're only just my own — no wonder."

The sun sunk in the sea, and night seemed to come on almost at once. The captain was at the wheel, as the *Mercier* slowly approached the anchorage Marat knew so well. The moon, approaching the full, made the white stretch of beach to shine, and put some sparkle in tall trunks of palms, which towered still and ghost-like, their high, over-luxuriant heads bristling, as it were with curl-papers.

There lay a small bight of shore, between a point to the north and another southeast. It was in this sheltered place the anchor was let go. Before all had been made snug, Wayne pointed out a glimmer of light coming through the island growth at the south.

“ Ah! ” said Jean Marat, looking, “ I theenk we will go and see. ”

Directly, a boat, bearing Wayne, Ray, and Marat, moved in to shore. Pulling the boat high on the beach, the three passed among the palms and came out to the south of the point. A fire burned on the white sand; and about it lounged five men. Off from shore, bathed in the moonlight, there stood out the masts and hull of a small schooner. As our three approached, one of the five stood up.

“ Is thad the *Miguel*? ” asked Jean Marat.

“ Si, *señor*, ” spoke he who stood. “ An’ you come in the *Mercier*? ” he added.

“ Yes, ” said Marat. “ Is Loyo with you? ” he asked. At this question Wayne saw a significant look pass among the loungers.

“ No, ” said the other. “ Loyo — he has thee seeckness — thee — rheumatiz’. I — a — Captain Lafitte Goya, my nam’ — I come in hees place. ”

“ I am Jean Marat, ” said Marat, “ and these young men are Wayne Scott and Ray Reid. ”

“ Señor Pedro Lamartine donot come? ” queried Lafitte Goya. “ He nevaire before sen’ any one helse to meet my crew. ”

His manner was of one trying to carry himself off well in a false position.

“ Pedro Lamartine ees dead, ” said Jean Marat.

“ Dead! ” said Goya. “ Ees those possib’! ”

To Wayne's eyes Lafitte Goya's astonishment was altogether feigned; and he observed an eloquently derisive smile on one single intellectual face among the men, a smile that seemed to give the lie to Goya's pretensions.

Marat went through the farce of corroborating his statement with certain details, well confident himself that it was not, any of it, news to Lafitte Goya. Goya then reported that the load of shell had been carried back, when the *Mercier* failed to meet the *Miguel* on the former voyage; and he gave some fragmentary account of Loyo's sickness, an account which, as it seemed to Wayne, did not ring altogether true. Strike a bell having streaks of impure metal, and to the acute ear it will ring with subtle inflections of tone of a false quality. And so it seemed plain to Wayne that Lafitte Goya was not telling the whole story of Loyo.

"You maybe have — a — some message for Loyo?" ventured Goya at last.

"Yes," said Jean Marat, "and for Julian Lamartine."

"Ah, well," said Goya, "I weel take heem."

"We make plan to sail with you — it ees necessary." Marat put it so, at a venture.

An antagonistic gleam mingled with Goya's startled look, as he replied:

"Na, na! those thing will not do. Loyo have thee instruction not so." Concealing the fact, as it is to be discovered, that Loyo was in no condition either to affirm

or deny any procedure that Lafitte Goya might choose to make.

The two then continued their argument in Spanish; and Wayne and Ray drew up to the men by the fire, Wayne seating himself close to the one whose look seemed immeasurably more inviting than the rest, and something in whose accent soon proclaimed him an Englishman.

“Have you been here long?” said Wayne.

“Two days,” said the man. “We picked up a jolly stiff wester coming by the Tor —”

“Norris!” came a hissing mandate from the watchful Goya.

The man broke sharp off in his speech, and with a contemptuous hunch of his shoulder, turned away from Wayne. But presently he turned on his belly, and without seeming, he whispered so Wayne could hear:

“That fellow isn’t on the square — watch out for him.”

All the while, as he debated with Marat, Goya kept a sharp eye on the group. And Wayne took note of Lafitte Goya’s outstanding characteristics: black coarse hair, and apparently much chewed moustache; nose, broad and like a knot in its midway; sharp eyes in ambush behind the drooping brim of his hat.

With a final nod of the head, Jean Marat turned from his parley, and called the boys. When the three were well out of ear-shot, Marat began:

"He weel not agree that we follow thee *Miguel* with thee *Mercier* — eet was no use to talk more. But he finally agree that two of you boys can go weeth in the *Miguel*, and take weeth you thee message' for Loyo and Julian; and we meet here again in seex week'. I donot know w'at to theenk. I donot like thees Lafitte Goya — he make too much the pretend. I tell him I led him know at daylight w'at we decide."

"Captain Marat," began Wayne. "Will you leave me here alone for an hour or so? I'd like to think about this. I'll make a little fire when I'm ready to come aboard."

"Say, Captain," said Ray. "I know him. If he stays here an hour — alone — he'll have enough thought out to fill a book. And you'll get a headache hearing it all."

And so Marat and Ray rowed aboard, leaving Wayne among the palms, alone in his cogitation. He walked toward the upper end of the small key. He set his mind to going over all the matter bearing on the business in hand, beginning with his finding the documents in the secret drawer of old Pedro Lamartine's bunk in the *Mercier's* cabin. Here was a boy of seventeen — Julian Lamartine — in a way, a captive in some secret place, having been kidnapped when a child of six, from his home with his grandfather. His kidnapper, now dead, has left written instructions to a servant — Loyo — directing him to return the lad to his home, and at the same

time to recover a certain hidden treasure — by some method known to Loyo, and partially hinted at in the written communication to the black fellow. This treasure is willed to Julian. The breaking into the cabin of the *Mercier*, with the marks on the secret drawer, point to the reasonable certainty that others beside Loyo, by some means have gained knowledge of the existence of the treasure, and hope by the possession of the documents contained in the secret drawer, to be set in the way of securing the treasure. Suspicion points to Lafitte Goya.

But then, it is not altogether impossible that Goya may, after all, be working for the interests of Julian and Loyo; and Goya's demeanor may be merely evidence of his suspicions, in turn, of Marat and the boys.

And then, finally, what is the duty of his — Wayne's — party? Have they not undertaken to seek out the missing Julian, and endeavor to return him to his grandfather, who even now sits waiting for news of a happy issue of their undertaking? And have not the boys their parents' approval of their purpose?

If Lafitte Goya is guilty of the evil purpose to steal the treasure, his one present aim is to gain possession of the documents addressed to Loyo and Julian. And these papers once on board the *Miguel*, he was sure to achieve his object; for what obstacle could two boys present? But then — happy thought! — it is not either of these letters that tells the hiding-place of the treasure. It is,

obviously, some knowledge locked up in Loyo's mind that is the key to the treasure-house.

And now, all the uncertainties aside, there is but one way open to gain knowledge of the whereabouts of the lost Julian. And the dangers in that way? Well, the end justifies them.

It took Wayne, then, but a short time more to determine on a plan which he would lay before the others. And so he made his little fire on the shore; and was soon brought on board the *Mercier*.

The whole company got about him as he went over the details of the situation as he had thought it out.

"And now," he said, "I propose that Slicky and I go with them in the *Miguel* — take along one of the wireless sets, wrapped up in some clothes in one of the chests; hide it on shore, when we get there; and when the chance comes, tell the *Mercier*, as near as possible, where the place is, and you can come to us. You see we can make a little log of the voyage, putting down everything that can help."

"Ah!" said Marat, "you have one good head."

"Isn't that what I told you?" said Ray. "And he knows Slicky's the one to take along."

"And," continued Wayne, "in case they should take the letters away from us, I can make copies and leave them here on the *Mercier*."

And so Wayne set to work at once to pen the copies, taking a location under a mosquito-bar, out of reach

of the night pests. And Ray helped Robert to tuck away one of the wireless sets in a leather steamer-trunk, with a few other things judged by Robert to be of possible use.

CHAPTER X

SAILING INTO THE UNKNOWN

IT was rather a low-spirited group that collected in the dark by the *Mercier's* rail. The steamer-trunk and rolls of blankets had already been passed down into the small boat. It was past three, the moon long ago gone down; and Wayne and Robert were saying their adieus to their comrades, excepting Marat and Ray, who were to row them to shore.

"I hate to see you going with that band," said Charlie Manners.

"Don't take any chances with them," urged Leslie Dunn. "Keep them friendly."

"They'll be the innocent kids, all right, I'll bet," said Ray.

"That we will," returned Robert.

"Well, good-bye, fellows," said Wayne. "Don't worry about us."

Jean Marat and Ray slipped down into the boat, followed by Wayne and Robert. And the boat moved shoreward, propelled by Robert and Ray, helped by the light breeze off the mainland.

"Now, Wayne," said Jean Marat, "be ver'—ver'

careful. Thad Goya ver' sharp. Don' led him fin' your telegraph. Thad would be bad."

"We won't give him any chance to suspect," assured Wayne.

The boat's prow touched the sand, and the little party filed out over the bow, setting the chest on the sand.

"Well, Ray," began Wayne, "don't forget the wireless for a minute, when the time comes. We may have very little chance."

"I won't forget, Wayne," said Ray. "I'll keep some one at it half of every hour. Don't let that worry you a second."

"I know I can depend on you, Ray. I wish *our* business was as sure."

"If something happen to the telegraph," said Marat, "remember we hunt for you all thee summer — and all thee winter if eet is necessar'."

And then Marat took the piece of baggage on his shoulder, and led the way, plunging into the obscurity, threading among the pillar-like palms.

No light of fire greeted them this time, as the four came out on the beach below the point. But directly, their ears caught the medley of sounds, from whispered breathing to stentorian snoring, that told of the nearness of slumberers; and they approached the crew of the *Miguel*, stretched on the sands, in the lee of the embers of fire, now converted into a smudge, to keep off the blood-hungry mosquitoes.

One of the company immediately arose, and with dried palm leaves and sticks, coaxed a blaze. It was Lafitte Goya.

"Ah, these the boy'," he said, eyeing Wayne and Robert, blanket laden.

"Yes," said Marat, putting down his burden, "these the boys thad go weeth you."

Goya smiled on them friendly-like. "Well, there come up some small win'; I theenk-a we mague sail."

And so he aroused those of the crew who were not already awake.

"To thee boads," ordered Goya.

In the light of the fire, Wayne caught the eye of the Englishman, called Norris, and nodded to the chest. Norris caught his meaning, and took the leather trunk on his shoulder.

"Well, good-bye, boys," said Jean Marat, giving each a hard squeeze of the hand.

Ray's farewell was of like warmth.

"Remember us to Mr. Blaisdell and the rest," called Robert, as the boys followed Lafitte Goya toward the boats. It was a speech meant for Goya's ears; for he thought it as well Goya should think it was planned for the *Mercier* to go back direct to New Orleans.

Arrived on board the *Miguel*, Norris carried the boys' chest into the cabin; and the boys stowed their blankets under a thwart of one of the boats, when they had been hoisted aboard. Sail was made at once; and a little be-

fore daybreak, the two boys, their binoculars to their eyes, looked back over some miles of water to the wee island with its graceful palms, and saw a fire, and as the light of day increased, what they knew to be the moving figures of their comrades. And finally the island faded away.

"It was just a little after four," said Wayne, giving expression to his consciousness of his and Robert's duties.

"Yes," murmured Robert, "and we're making about three knots now — don't you think?"

"Let's squat down by this boat," said Wayne, "and you watch while I take a peep at my compass."

Lafitte Goya was at the wheel; and the men lounged forward, showing that Goya kept up ship discipline. An old dark-skinned Spaniard was busy in the galley.

"All right," said Robert, after a glance around.

"We're making due south," said Wayne, slipping his little compass back into his shirt.

Captain Goya presently called one of the men to the wheel, and then came forward to the boys, his mien friendly; though it did not seem to Wayne that his smile was genuine quite.

"It iz goin' be fine-a day," he said. "But I would like much-a it be more strong — thee win'."

"We're not used to the ocean," said Robert, "and we don't like awful strong winds. Looks like we're going pretty fast now."

Robert was beginning at once to play his part of an innocent.

Goya smiled. "You nod much acquaind' wid de sea. Der is some rule'," he said. "De sailor', he stay in de bow, an' de passenger', he stay in de back place of de ship; an' de sailor', he not allow' to talk wid de passenger'."

The cook beat a signal, and Goya invited the boys to join him at breakfast. The captain's difficulties with the English language were, to an extent, greater than has been indicated. So he tortured his tongue no more than he thought necessary to convince his company of his friendliness.

The boys found the *Miguel*, in most particulars, a sister ship to the *Mercier*. She seemed a trifle shorter, and more blunt in the bows; she carried about an equal show of canvas, and was of slightly less tonnage.

They missed Rufe's cooking. The dishes they now attacked were unduly hot with spices; and in spite of the passing hours, their mouths had not yet cooled, when hunger and the cook's signal called them to another inward bath of fire.

It was during the noon repast that the boys noted some activity telling of a change of course. In Spanish, Goya gave an order to the man at the wheel; and the sheets were eased away to take the breeze from astern. So when the lads got themselves alone again, there was another peep at the compass.

"West by south, a half point south," announced

Wayne. "What do you think we are making now?"

"Nearly five knots, I guess," said Robert. "It would be great if we could have a chart."

"Yes," agreed Wayne. "I've got a kind of a picture of the one on the *Mercier*, but I'm afraid it won't help much. Now let's see: course, south, four o'clock to twelve — eight hours, at three knots. That's twenty-four miles. Hope that's right. We'll have to jot that down tonight. And we'll have to keep watch, turn about."

"You notice," observed Robert, "we're going pretty much west now. As they were going that way anyhow, they might have pointed that way when we left the island, instead of sailing straight south twenty-four miles first. And the wind would have been right behind, too."

"Yes," agreed Wayne, "I've just been thinking about that. And of course the reason is, that Goya wanted to fool Jean Marat, and not let him get a guess at the direction to the place we're sailing to. You see, just as soon as we got far enough south to be sure he wouldn't be seen by the *Mercier*, he changed the course. I'll bet if we should meet any vessel, he'd change the course again, till we got out of sight."

At night, the boys spread their blankets and rigged up their mosquito-bar on deck, beside the port boat. Screened under a blanket, Robert furnished an occasional gleam from his flash-light, while Wayne wrote on a small slip of paper, as follows:

S 24 M — W by S 1-2 S.

Robert then made a copy on another bit of paper.

"Now, Slicky," whispered Wayne, "if you take the watch eight to twelve, I'll take twelve to four. The deck planks are pretty straight, fore and aft."

So Wayne removed his shoes and trousers, and turned over, to sleep. Robert bared a piece of the deck, set his compass on it; and, taking a corner of blanket for a screen, used his flash as he regulated the compass; and soon made out that the deck cracks were pointing west by south, half south. About every half hour he repeated the operation. And finally, when there were sounds of the sailors changing watch, a flash of light on his watch showed the time twelve o'clock; and he shook Wayne awake.

"No change," he reported. "Breeze about the same."

But the first half hour of Wayne's watch had not gone, when he noted a puffiness in the wind; and directly, he heard the squeak of the blocks, as the watch hauled in a foot or two of the sheets, the wind having veered a little to the south, and considerably freshened. The moon shone bright on the bulging mainsail, which Wayne studied some minutes. "I believe she's making six knots now," he finally told himself. And he set his compass on the small patch of bare deck, under the mosquito-bar, and found that the course remained unchanged.

"Twelve hours at four knots," he calculated to himself; "that's forty-eight miles on this course."

He got out the bit of paper and wrote in the figures. When he called Robert, at four, he gave him account of the changed conditions, and recommended that he make his notation.

And so it went without anything more to note till a little before eight of the morning. Then the man on watch sent some word in Spanish back to the captain, who climbed to the fore-cross-trees, and leveled his glasses toward the southern horizon.

"We'll act like we pay no attention," said Wayne.

But when Goya returned to the deck, and was gone aft to put away his glasses in the cabin, Wayne and Robert, each in turn, smuggled a look through their binoculars.

"Did you see it?" murmured Wayne.

"Yes," said Robert. "It's some island."

"The only islands I remember seeing on the chart, over this way," said Wayne, "are the Dry Tortugas."

"Do you remember the distance?" questioned Robert.

"No, Slicky, I didn't notice. But let's figure up, now. Yesterday noon, twenty-four miles south; then west by south half south, twelve hours at four knots — forty-eight miles; then eight hours (to now) at six knots — forty-eight miles more, or ninety-six miles on this course. I'll bet it's the Dry Tortugas."

"Let's listen," suggested Robert. "We might hear some one say the name."

Without moving too near toward the bows, which were forbidden to the boys, they edged over on the deck; and

as they glanced toward the sailors, they noted the Englishman, Norris, looking as if to attract them, and nodding toward the south. Then, speaking to one of the sailors in the Spanish —“ Tortugas ” rang out amongst the words he spoke. It was plain, he meant to convey the name to the boys.

“ Why,” said Wayne, at the same time nodding acknowledgment to the man, “ that’s the name that he tried to speak to me on the island, when Goya shut him up. Well, we guessed right. That’ll help if we get a chance to reach the *Mercier* by the wireless.”

CHAPTER XI

THE SECRET LOG — THE PEARL ISLES

SO soon as that faint streak of an island of the Dry Tortugas had faded into the east of south, Wayne and Robert became conscious of another change of course. The men were again trimming sail; and the rising billows struck more on the beam. And this was the signal for the boys to crouch on deck, under shelter of a boat, and consult the compass once more.

“Southwest by west, a half south,” announced Wayne.

Except for short periods, during squalls and the like, this was the course destined to be held till they should make land again. The wind continued to freshen, and Wayne and Robert were driven to make new calculations — or guesses — as to the speed of the *Miguel*. And that night — because of the wind — they must dispense with the shelter of the mosquito-bar; and yet it was not so great a deprivation, since the same wind kept all but a few of the most bold of the mosquitoes in their lairs below decks.

The boys had soon begun to feel the irksomeness of their isolation. With the exception of the Englishman, Norris, there was no soul among the lot toward whom

they could feel any sense of fellowship, with whom know any wish in common. Again excepting the Englishman, the men were in all ways as exotic as their speech; a swarthy, rough lot, with ambitions but little above beasts. The man Norris, too, the boys easily made out, was sickened of his dark associates; and recognizing something of his own quality in the boys, would eagerly have fraternized with them. With many smiles and secret nods he created a kind of intimacy. And the boys took much comfort of this friendly understanding.

As time went on, Captain Lafitte Goya was at less pains to smile conviction into the boys' minds of the amity of his intentions. Times, at meals, he ignored them completely; and he began to be quite sharp with them when they inclined a least bit toward the bows. So it became very plain to them that Goya's aim was to keep them from all contact with the man Norris, of whose attachment to his interests he had come to have none too great conviction. And it was one named Gomez — a thin-lipped, sneak of a creature, who habitually wore a red bandanna, turbanwise, for head-gear — who spied for Goya. There were periods when this chap seemed never to take his eyes off them; it seemed almost as if he were trying to cast a spell upon them. And doubtless he held some exaggerated notion of the importance of his vigilance.

The boys had early become convinced that this Gomez

was the very person whom Mr. Blaisdell had encountered on the quay in New Orleans, and the one who had broken into the cabin of the *Mercier* and ransacked the trunks and the secret drawer. He tallied well with Mr. Blaisdell's description; and none of the others could be picked as having sufficient cunning.

It happened one day that Robert caught the fellow Gomez's eye peering along the alleyway from behind the house, to where Wayne sat in the boat's shelter, busy with his secret log. Immediately after, Robert saw Goya leave the wheel and start briskly forward.

"Gomez saw you — the captain's coming!" whispered Robert. "Chuck it overboard!"

Wayne instead thrust the small paper into his mouth; and at once began making drawings on another bit of paper, of uncouth moon faces.

"W'at it ees you write?" said Goya, having come round the boat.

Wayne showed him the drawings; whereupon he sniffed, and began to question the boys with the (to them evident) design to learn what they might know regarding the situation at sea. But they were equal to the pinch; and he got such responses as seemed to satisfy him of their total ignorance. It was more in their puzzled look and silence, as they cast wandering eyes about the unbroken horizon, as if for landmarks, than in anything they finally found to say, that he seemed to find convic-

tion that they had no guess where they were. Thus they hoodwinked him. And he went back to the wheel to give Gomez a round scolding for his zeal.

So it came about that Wayne had to make a new copy of his log — from Robert's.

Tranquillity had not long reigned again, when it became suddenly evident to the boys that there was some spring of dissatisfaction on board. On the forecastle, the men, heads together, were talking and gesticulating angrily. But the boys had no suspicion of being in any relation to the show; till finally one of the men stalked back to the captain with a word from the crew.

The boys, attracted by the sailor's unusual demeanor, were looking on when the captain received him. They saw an angry gleam in Goya's eye, as he listened to the man. And the next minute he ordered the whole crew aft. They came boldly; each had something to say, except Norris, who seemed indifferent; and Goya made some kind of hot speech. And then he turned and called the boys, who came forward wondering what possible part they could have in so warm a debate. Goya addressed them:

“You have one lettär to Loyo — one lettär writ' to Loyo from Pedro Lamartine — not so?”

“Yes, we have,” said Wayne, at the same time putting his hand over the breast of his jacket, to indicate the exact resting-place of the document. For he had begun to have some fear that a search might be made in the chest

for the paper thought so much of, and so lead to the discovery of the wireless set.

At Wayne's reply, the captain's face took on a disdainful and superior smile, and with a sharp word or two he sent the men forward again; and it seemed as if some moot question were thus settled. It had the appearance, too, of some kind of triumph for Goya; for he showed it plainly, and played his authority thereafter with the greater assumption.

The boys, of course, could not understand a word of the talk between the others. But they were busy putting two and two together; and, although neither was at all sure of his premises, both anyhow arrived at pretty much the one conclusion. Wayne expressed it very fairly, when they got back to their usual place by the boat again.

"I'll tell you, Slicky," he finally said; "the men have been promised a share, and weren't sure that we had the letters with us — especially Loyo's, supposed to tell where the treasure is — and thought the captain told them we had them without being sure himself. And so he asked us before them to prove he was sure."

Robert confessed his like interpretation.

"And then maybe they wanted him to take the letters away from us, if we had them; and most likely he told them that we might run across a government boat or something, and the officers would find out from us that something was wrong, and so he's waiting."

"That's how it looked," agreed Robert. "Yet," he

continued, fearing to jump at a conclusion, "it might be, after all, that Loyo is just sick, and everything can be explained in a friendly way. But —"

"Yes," said Wayne. "But the *looks* of this Goya, and his being so anxious, and —. No, I don't think, from what Jean Marat says, that Loyo would trust others to go and get those letters from the *Mercier*, even if he *was* sick. And then you remember what this Norris whispered to me about Goya not being on the square? No, I'll tell you — when we get to the place, we've got to look out, sharp, and get the wireless and our logs hid the first chance, or everything will go against us."

The breeze, fair and constant for so many hours after the passing of the Dry Tortugas, petered out in the night, leaving the *Miguel*, as it were, stranded on a dead calm. But not for long; a wet squall out of the west pounced on the schooner. Sail was shortened, and they beat it out short-hauled. The rain poured down for above an hour, driving the boys into the cabin. Then finally it settled down to a chill nor'wester, that kept the *Miguel* at a steady pace for another twelve or fourteen hours.

This fickleness of the elements all but drove Wayne and Robert into despair, as they struggled with their calculations; till finally they concluded that it would be safe to ignore the influence of the storm.

It was while they were in the cabin, out of the rain, that the boys took advantage of an interval when Goya was above, and gave a look to their leather chest.

"They've been trying to pick the lock," declared Robert, pointing to marks on the brass about the key-hole.

"Well, they didn't get it open," said Wayne. "And I don't believe they'll bother again, since I've let them know I've got the letters in my clothes."

The sun had but just relinquished its lingering hold on the watery eastern horizon, when the boys were awakened by voices lifted in shouting. Goya they saw on the deck, looking to Gomez, aloft, legs clinging to the main cross-trees, from which perch he called down news of something far away, off the bow.

By six, the boys were able to make out a rise of land ahead, to which the schooner pointed direct.

"That's where we're going to," declared Robert.

"Yes, looks like it," said Wayne. "And I believe it's an island."

Under the stiffening easterly breeze, the *Miguel* moved steadily in, bringing the picture ever larger and more distinct in the field of the binoculars.

"Doesn't it look pretty?" said Robert.

"And the palms look as if they had been planted there for a park," observed Wayne.

"And there are some pretty big hills," said Robert.

"Looks like a range of them running southward," said Wayne.

By nine o'clock the *Miguel* had come fairly close in, and directly was standing to round the northwest point of the island. To the starboard, here and there, the

water foamed over hidden rocks of coral. And the boys took note of a line of bursting breakers, going all around the upper end of the island as far as they could see, and giving evidence of a barrier of reefs.

The boys stood by the port bulwarks, as the *Miguel* moved leisurely southeastward, down the lee shore. A pine forest, with here and there a clump of palms, opened out beyond the point, and continued to fill their eyes with its attractions till, a mile down, the forest abruptly terminated on the edge of marshy ground, in the midst of which showed the opening of a bayou, or the mouth of a stream. Then came into the panorama a thick forest of hard woods, all backed by the tier of hills. All the way the beach shone glaring white, and the line of breakers continued, giving warning not to snuggle too close to the shore.

The boys kept a keen lookout for some sign of habitation. But it was not till they had had about three miles of this coasting, that their eyes got glimpse of any work of man.

"There!" said Wayne. "In among those palms. See it?"

"Yes," returned Robert, peering through his glasses. "Looks some like a Japanese house roofed with palm leaves."

Then, as the *Miguel* moved on, there came an end to the island, and another island showed to the southeastward, the water between about a quarter mile across.

The steersman hove to the schooner, and the anchor was dropped. Opposite this space between the islands there was a break in the reef chain, as shown by an interval of smooth water. Here was the passage to the inside; but both wind and tide opposed the sailing in. It was the noon hour when the sails were taken in; and long before two o'clock, the tide turned, and the flood began again. But the wind held on, coming from between the islands, and Lafitte Goya had out one of the boats, and with two men — one was Norris — went ashore.

"I wish *we* could land," said Robert.

"I've just been thinking," said Wayne, "that if we don't get there till dark, it'll suit us better."

"Yes, that's so," admitted Robert; "on account of the wireless."

"I wish, though," said Wayne, "that we could have got a chance to talk with the man, Norris. He might help us."

"Yes," said Robert. "If we just only knew Goya's plans, so we could have an idea how we can manage."

"We'll just have to watch our chance," said Wayne.

And so the boys suffered on, hour after hour, on pins and needles, as the critical time approached. They saw an occasional figure on shore, among the palms, where the house stood; but nothing to relieve the suspense.

Toward sundown the wind eased, and Goya and his men came rowing back.

The other boat was put overboard, two ropes passed out, and they began towing the *Miguel* through the passage into the lagoon. In half an hour the anchor again was cast; and dusk was on when the boys got a gruff order from Goya to prepare for shore. Goya's mien now had lost all seeming of friendliness; it suddenly became as if he owed the boys a grudge, and was now set on venting it.

CHAPTER XII

HIDING THE WIRELESS — PRISONERS

IN the tropics there is no lingering twilight. Daylight fled from the lagoon, as night shadows spread abroad, as from leafy caverns of the island forest. But the white beach reflected the softer light of a bright moon, and some scattered palms still showed their comely forms in silhouette.

For the boys there had already begun that period of trial. They strove to hide their sufferings under calm faces. It was with great relief they saw Norris voluntarily shoulder their chest and carry it to the boat, seeming almost as if he divined their wish to keep others from feeling its weight. They climbed into the boat with Goya, each with his blanket-roll, and directly, they were moving shoreward.

Wayne and Robert scarce glanced at one another in the moonlight, each busy with dread thoughts of a new status in which they were like to find themselves the moment they stepped on shore. Lafitte Goya's new and distinctly unfriendly attitude gave force to all the suspicions that had racked them heretofore. They looked forward to the meeting with the lad, Julian Lamartine, and Loyo;

but Goya's present hostile mien taken into account, his ambiguous report of Loyo's sickness, and all — they got but meager comfort of the prospect.

In spite of their perturbed state of mind, the beauty of the moonlit beach, backed by the dark, pillared arcades of the forest, was not lost on the boys. So attractive a play-park they'd never thought to see; if only they might enjoy a season there under happier auspices.

The men pulled up to a bit of rustic wharf, and all climbed up; and the boys marched across the beach behind Norris, who again bore their precious chest on his shoulder. Among the hammock of palm and oak, the party came upon the little house. They entered a room, unoccupied, in the center of which hung a lighted kerosene lamp from the roof and over a table. Taking up a lantern, Lafitte Goya waved the boys into another room, at the back, where were a pair of beds, bearing signs of recent occupancy; and there showed a single window, to the west. Here Norris put down the leather chest, and at a word from the captain, retired.

And then, with a sinister look out from under his hat brim, and an imperious gesture, Lafitte Goya spoke.

"Now den, mague you' sev' de troub', an' ged oud dem lettarr," he said. And as Wayne hesitated a wee moment, he added in a sharper manner, "I tol' you, give dem lettarr!"

Then, Wayne immediately unpinned the breast pocket of his jacket, and drew out the documents, which Goya

snatched from his hands, going out, taking the lantern, and closing the door.

"This is our one chance!" whispered Wayne, "if the window will open. Try it. I'll open the trunk."

Robert examined the window, and found it held merely by a nail, loose in its hole, and he slid it easily back. In a minute Wayne had the chest open, and the suit-case, holding the wireless set, unwrapped of its coverings.

"Get out through the window, and I'll hand it to you," whispered Wayne. And he gave Robert a hand, to get him through without noise, and put out the suit-case. "Here's my log — put it in," he added. "Now find a good place — and make sure of your landmarks, so we can find it again."

"Never fear," assured Robert. And he hurried off in the shadows.

The underbrush was not over thick immediately back of the house, and Robert made good progress for about two hundred yards north, on a course parallel with the beach on the west. Then he came to a shallow stream, through which he splashed, to find the brush, under large moss-hung oaks, very rank, in clumps. Stopping by the second bit of thicket above the beach, he put into the suit-case the two logs of the voyage, and his flash light and binoculars. He thrust the suit-case under the fallen branch of an oak in the thicket, and pulled down handsfull of Spanish moss for additional covering; and then he turned back.

Wayne listened to the excited voices in Spanish talk, in the front room; and made out that Goya was stumbling through the reading of Loyo's letter, now and then demanding a word of help from Norris. He stood by the window shaking with the fear of discovery, and praying for speed on the part of Robert.

Then finally the dreaded thing happened. Wayne heard the clatter of chairs pushed back, and he had just glided to a seat on the leather chest, when the door opened and Lafitte Goya appeared, holding the lantern. His face showed his disappointment; but when, with a sweep of his eyes, he noted Robert's absence, and the open window — Wayne felt he'd never seen a more diabolic expression of face. The man thundered forth something in Spanish; and then demanded the whereabouts of the missing boy.

Before Wayne could make a reply, Robert climbed in through the window.

The irascible Goya broke out in Spanish again; and then he put some dire threats in English. But too intent on another matter, he gave over to make further demands for explanation; and calling Gomez, he ordered Wayne to unlock the leather chest. He searched carefully through the pieces of clothing. Then, with Gomez's help, he searched the boys, from hat bands to shoe soles. He finished with a Spanish oath.

"Now you boy', tell me *de true!*" he thundered, "or I break-a you' head!" And he made a threatening ges-

ture. "Whar is one more lettarr of Pedro Lamartine?"

"I gave you all there was," declared Wayne.

"You lie! — you have hide one!" threatened Goya.

"No," insisted Wayne. "I gave all there was."

"Who fin' de lettarr' — in dat box?" demanded Goya.

"I did," said Wayne.

Goya seemed at an end; and he and Gomez eyed one another a moment. Then Goya broke out on Gomez in Spanish, lambasting him in some harangue, the terms of which were all unintelligible to the boys, except a single word — the name of "Loyo" which found frequent repetition. It was as if some circumstance, closely connected with the black man, Loyo, had vitally disarranged Lafitte Goya's enterprise, and that Gomez was at the bottom of the fault, whatever it was.

After a warning to the boys not to again leave the room without permission, Goya went out with Gomez, closing the door. The talk continued for some minutes in the next room, then came sounds of their going out by the front door, and all became quiet.

Wayne and Robert, left in darkness, removed their shoes and snuggled up to one another on one of the beds, the better to carry on converse in whispers.

"We got the wireless out by the skin of our teeth," said Wayne. "How came you to be so long?"

"I had to go a long way to find a place," returned Robert.

"Can you find it again, easy?"

"Yes, and it's a good place."

"Well, there's no guess-work now about how things stand."

"No, Goya's after old Pedro's treasure-box, all right. I wonder where Julian Lamartine and Loyo are."

"I've got an idea they were here till Goya went ashore today. He probably moved them to some other place — didn't want us to see them."

"He's boss of everything here now, looks like. What do you think he's going to do?"

"Well," mused Wayne, "of course he's going to try to find that treasure. He didn't get what he expected out of those letters — especially Loyo's; and now he'll try to get what he wants out of Loyo himself. You remember what Pedro's letter says to Loyo about the 'directions drilled' into Loyo's mind?"

"Yes," said Robert, "but why wasn't Goya satisfied about that? Why did he search us for another letter?"

"Maybe he just hoped there was some other letter of directions. If we could only get to see Loyo and Julian!"

"I reckon he's going to keep us prisoners — afraid on general principles we might interfere some way with his plans."

"Yes, I think so," agreed Wayne. "And now we'll have to watch for a chance to get away and try to signal the *Mercier*. If they only knew the general direction we sailed, they might be part way here."

"But we'll have to get hold of some grub," said Robert, "and —"

"Sh!" interrupted Wayne. "Listen!"

Immediately the whispering ceased, and the boys set their ears to listen. They heard a sound resembling somewhat a mouse's gnawing.

"Is it a rat?"

"Sounds to me like some one boring," said Robert. "You breathe loud, like sleeping, and I'll sneak over."

Robert cautiously stocking-footed it over to the tongue-and-grooved partition, where his ear caught faint sounds of some person crouched close on the other side. And directly, he heard a wee jarring in the wall, as of an instrument breaking through. Robert toed it back to the bed, whence he saw the light of the next room through a hole the size of a nail. But before he had time to begin a whispered report to Wayne, the door opened; and both boys observed the clawed, monkey-like hand of Gomez thrust slowly in, to set a lantern on the floor. The hand withdrew, and the door closed, leaving the boys the hypothetic comfort of a light. The boys, quick to discern a motive, lay back, heads together.

"A peek-hole," said Wayne. "His eye is there by now. Let's wake up and begin fooling them. I guess they think we know more than we do."

"All right," agreed Robert.

So, for the benefit of the spying eye at the peek-hole,

they began to play their parts. Wayne got on his elbow, and shook Robert.

"Somebody has given us a light," he said aloud.

"Sure enough," said Robert, turning over to look.

They sat on the edge of the bed and stretched themselves, like a pair newly awakened.

"Is it morning yet?" said Robert, affecting a yawn.

Wayne consulted his watch. "It isn't midnight yet."

"I feel better." Robert stretched again.

"We ought to have lots of fun on this island," observed Wayne. "I don't see what made Captain Goya so mad at us. No harm in your slipping out the window a minute. I hope Julian's a nice fellow. He might have let *us* give those letters to Julian and Loyo."

And there continued the mock-innocent prattle, calculated to disarm the suspicions of the listeners at the peep-hole. The boys turned out the contents of their chest, and laid out some change of wear; and finally got into bed again, soon to fall into genuine sleep, as evidenced in their breathing.

One keeping vigil might, after a time, have heard another sleeper on the other side of the partition. And, too, outside, he might have seen the figure of a man played upon by an occasional moon-beam, as the leaves moved aside under the breath of the gentle night breeze. The man squatted, his back to an oak, so situated as to control a view of the boys' window.

These precautions on the part of Lafitte Goya, did not

augur well for the comfort of the boys against whom they were taken. And from these measures it was evident Goya was in fear that the boys would escape to some one of the innumerable hiding-places, there to bide an opportunity to signal some chance passing vessel. For he could not be altogether sure that they had not discovered his designs; considered his procedure of the evening. And, too, there was the suspicious slipping away through the window of one of the boys.

Except for the gentle rustling of the lower dried leaves of palms, and the distant croaking of the bullfrogs, the night hours passed in quiet. Then suddenly there piped out the sweet, half melancholy note of a whippoorwill. "Whip-poor-wi-ll! whip-poor-wi-ll!" went the call. And one of the boys started up, on an elbow, rubbing his eyes, and listened. He shook his comrade.

"Slicky!" he whispered. "Slicky! Listen! — Do you hear?"

"Yes," said Robert, sitting. "Our patrol call."

"It's a funny thing," began Wayne. "I was just dreaming I was home in bed, and I heard one of you fellows whistling the patrol call, outside; and I wondered who it was could whistle it so good. And then I woke."

The lantern still burned within the door. The boys crawled out and over to the window, hoping the better to hear the bird, who continued his sweet night call.

"Look!" whispered Wayne, pointing to the half-hid figure by the oak.

The sight brought the boys down with a shock, to the recollection of their present troubles; and, dispirited, they limped back to bed. There each settled down to his own more or less gloomy thoughts; which, however, were not without some flares of hope. And finally sleep came again to recruit them for the trials to come.

CHAPTER XIII

ROBERT ESCAPES

THE light of day shone in at their solitary window when Wayne and Robert awoke, hearing foot-falls and voices in the next room. They were pulling on their clothes when the door opened, and the side-looking Gomez appeared, and with signs indicated to the boys that they were to come forth. When they had finished dressing and emerged from the door of the house, Gomez stood ready, and waved them toward a building of greater size, some hundred yards eastward, near the shore. At the back stood a long table, roofed over, from which near a dozen men were just rising, having finished breakfast.

The boys looked about them as they went. They had never viewed anything in nature so attractive. Looking between the tall trunks of the cocoa-nut palms and the royal palms, close under which their path bore them, their eyes went above the forest of oaks and other hard woods, to the barren crown of the hither end of the range of hills. To the south, they looked across the third of a mile of clear, green and blue water—quiet by reason of the protecting barrier of reefs

—and noted the glittering beach, and palms and hills of a lesser island. Flowers near their feet, and singing birds among trees, helped to give the region a peaceful, joyful look. But for the boys the whole was black-stained with the skulking figure of Gomez who came behind them, and who, they were to find, was especially delegated to be their keeper. And when they took seats at an end of the long table, their ears were vexed by the harsh sounds of Lafitte Goya's voice, coming from the long house close by.

Before the boys had finished their meal, brought from a cook-house at the end, the men appeared round the corner of the house, and set off, single file, by a path into the forest. About half of the crew carried shovels. And among them was the Englishman; and Wayne and Robert watched for a nod or smile of recognition. But he went on, not even so much as turning his face their way. This thing was indeed a shock to them, for Norris was the only one of the lot that had shown them the least fellow feeling.

But Lafitte Goya came up to the table, a malign look in his face, and in a jarring voice laid his injunctions on the boys. They were to make no attempt to stroll out of Gomez's keeping; and if they were to disobey — well, it would be the worse for them.

“You hear of dat Lafitte?” he said, “dat pirate, Lafitte? I s'all tell you, I am descend' of heem. He wass my grace-gran'-fadder. I am one Lafitte.” And he

swaggered as he asserted his pirate lineage; and scowled menacingly.

Wayne expressed a wish that they might be allowed a bath in the lagoon.

Goya made no answer, but took Gomez aside for a private word, giving him his orders with reference to the prisoners, as the boys guessed from the occasional look their way. It was now the boys managed to stow bits of bread and meat in their pockets, for they had plans of their own.

On the way back to their assigned quarters, Wayne took note of something back among the palms, and indicated to Gomez that he wished to go that way. Gomez, with a sinister smile hovering about his thin lips, indicated assent, and followed the boys to a spot where two mounds showed. They were evidently graves. The hearts of both Wayne and Robert sank with the same thought, and they exchanged looks. Wayne turned to Gomez.

"Julian and Loyo?" he questioned, pointing to the graves.

A glitter of hate flashed in Gomez's face, and his hand twitched with some emotion, as he hesitated to reply. Then there came again that sinister smile, and he nodded as if to say — "Yes, it is Julian and Loyo."

Wayne and Robert gave another look to the two graves, and then passed on toward the house. The gloomiest thoughts clouded their faces, as they sat on the

bed. They did not give voice to what passed in their minds, for they were not deceived by Gomez, in the next room, doubtless listening, and were very sure that he was far from being as ignorant of the English speech as he pretended.

More than once had a certain fear bobbed up in Wayne's mind, always to be vanquished by ever-fending hope. So when his eye glimpsed those two mounds among the palms, that — hitherto transitory — fear now gripped him with a strangle hold; and he was prepared for Gomez's corroboration of the things he dreaded might be.

With Julian and Loyo dead, here were all his dreams of a rescue and a happy restitution come to a fearful end. And what a piece of news to carry back to old Mr. Charles Lamartine, whose only hold on life was the thought of again taking into embrace of eye and arm his dear lad Julian, torn from him so many years ago! Wayne's mind had been so filled with his happy projects, that he had given little thought to the dangers that seemed to surround him. He had no doubt that those who lay within those mounds out there had suffered violent deaths; and from Gomez's demeanor at mention of the names, he had hardly less doubt that Gomez had had a hand in the foul business.

The door opened and Gomez beckoned the boys out. He led them to the west beach, and gave them to understand that they might go in for a swim. Wondering

just a bit over this seeming of graciousness, the boys stripped and started water-ward, while Gomez, in pantomime, mumbling Spanish words, indicated boundaries beyond which they must not go. They had some conceit of the real purpose, which was, to put them in some measure at their ease, so that they might be the more disposed to talk freely between themselves, or by some free action divulge, to the alert ear and eye of the nimble Gomez, some clue — of which they were still suspected of having knowledge — to the hiding-place of Pedro Larmartine's treasure.

The boys moved out to the limits Gomez had indicated. And while Gomez — opposite them on the beach — crouched, ear cocked and eye askant, Robert managed to give Wayne a view of the brush-clump in which the wireless lay hid. Between bits of prattle aloud — for Gomez's ear — they contrived to carry on serious converse in whispers. Though the whispering did not pass unperceived by Gomez — sharp that he was.

"Well," said Robert, "what are we going to do now?"

"I've been thinking about that," said Wayne.

And he went over a plan he had, which we will leave to reveal itself in its execution.

All day, the boys were permitted to stroll about the immediate environs, Gomez at their heels. At noon they visited the mound of oyster shells, and came upon some large work boats, resembling whaleboats, drawn high on the beach, and now drying out from disuse.

That night the boys were in no hurry to crawl into bed. They chatted freely, striving to appear at ease, recounting their adventures on the old Mississippi; and they read and discussed a copy of "Robinson Crusoe," got out of their chest; but every moment praying secretly for the coming of the opportunity on which they had set their hearts; and conscious all the while, that Gomez crouched at the peep-hole in the partition.

Gomez was shrewd enough to perceive that they two were full of a secret. But he persuaded himself it had to do with the whereabouts of the treasure; and he did not cease to hope they would at last divulge it in some way.

Now and again one of the two would — as if by chance — put himself before that gimlet-hole, shutting off Gomez's view of the window. And the other would look out, eagerly, to where crouched the sentinel, his form and posture more or less discernible in the filtered beams of the moon.

At last it came. It was past midnight, and the lantern illumined the room again. Wayne got before Gomez's peep-hole, and Robert made a twentieth visit to the window. One look, and he turned back, eyes glistening with excitement. In pantomime he indicated that the sentinel was asleep.

"Say," then spoke Robert aloud, "I'm going to bed, Wayne."

"All right," returned Wayne. "You get into bed. I'll crawl in, too, in a minute."

With that he pulled the chest over, and keeping his back close before the peep-hole, he shuffled the receptacle noisily, and kept up his talk, while Robert slid back the window, crawled out, and pushed it shut again. Wayne then, continuing his story, threw off his clothes and crawled into bed, where he mumbled away in pretence of converse for some time. Then ensued a quiet period, which he broke by saying aloud, "Well, Slicky, I hope tomorrow will be as fine a day as this was." And he finally ended the farce with adding, "Darned if you aren't asleep!"

Long, Wayne lay pretending to sleep, in mind following Robert, hurrying away through the forest, and praying that his comrade might find a safe place of hiding before the escape should be discovered. That Gomez had been thoroughly befooled, was shown in the perfect quiet that continued to reign on the other side of the wall. Wayne gave some thought to the storm that was sure to break when the fact of Robert's escape should be discovered. That he would be made to suffer in some way for the thing, he had no doubt. But the thought brought him no qualms; it was worth most any price — the chance to communicate with the *Mercier*.

When, in the morning, Gomez opened the door to signify to the boys that it was time to be about, Wayne was slow to respond; for he wished to give Robert all the

time possible to prepare against pursuit. And he gave the hungry Gomez occasion twice to look in before he made a proper move to get on his clothes.

Then finally Gomez sensed that something was amiss. He took two apprehensive steps into the room and looked about. At last he was startled into betraying his knowledge of the English, for he burst out:

“Whar thee other one?”

Wayne busied himself with his shoes, and made no answer.

Gomez rushed out of the door, and immediately Wayne heard a shrill whistle, and after a short space, excited voices out front; and Lafitte Goya burst into Wayne's presence.

“Whar thee other one go?” demanded Goya.

Wayne shrugged his shoulders, but kept silent.

Goya was not of a character to persevere in verbal inquiry. If he did not get his answer at once, he would invariably fall back on his own resources, jump at a conclusion, and act on impulse. He called in two of the men, had them bind Wayne to a chair, his hands to the back; and he posted an armed guard over him. Then, in the front room, Gomez and the last night's sentinel came in for a verbal thrashing, in the Spanish. Finally came the calling together of the men, and other sounds, that Wayne had no doubt were precursors to the pursuit of Robert. And all departed except the guard.

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Turning from the window, Robert gave one look over his shoulder to the sentinel, asleep by the oak, and sped off to the north for near a hundred yards. Then, to conceal his trail, he ran to the beach, and kept to the water till he reached the bit of a stream, up which he waded to the brush wherein he had concealed the suit-case holding the wireless set. He thrust in his hand, and the valued apparatus recovered, he hurried north toward the hills.

The moon, still big, sent bright beams into the open spaces of the forest, and so long as he was not pursued, proved for Robert a valuable ally, lighting his way. The tree-barren hill-tops stood out, almost bright as day. Robert kept to the left of the ridge, alternately trotting and walking as he went.

Here and there a night-bird piped out, and soon the many-toned night glee of the bullfrogs told Robert that he was nearing the region of marsh that had showed from the deck of the *Miguel* the day they coasted south. He soon came upon a branch of the stream that meandered through the marsh, and this he followed to the forking, within which triangular space grew a heavy thicket. He stopped his flight to reconnoiter. This mass of brush was so close-grown that even a dog of size could not have penetrated.

“If I could get in there,” thought Robert, “I’d be all right till they got tired hunting.”

One of the great moss-festooned oaks sent a large limb in over the thicket. Robert eyed this; and soon he was

creeping out on this branch; and when he had gained a position well over the thicket, he peered down. But the shadow was too deep. Out came his flash-light, and a few moments' gaze into the place illumined by the little circle of light satisfied him.

It was with some enthusiasm he hurried back to the ground, where he took out of the suit-case two lengths of rope. Using one, he slung the suit-case to his back; the other he hung to his belt, and again went into the oak. Having reached his former position, he made a few knots in his rope, passed it round the limb, and tied the ends together. Next, he was careful to pull from off the near branches some handsfull of Spanish moss and drop it to the ground. And finally he swung himself off the limb, and, hanging by the rope, let himself down in the midst of the dense thicket. The suit-case unlashed, his first care was to wrap his rope ladder about with the Spanish moss, pulling the rope, like a buckled belt, around the limb, till the moss effectually concealed the strands from any one who should chance to look that way.

The position was not the most agreeable in the world, one's movements so circumscribed by this great compactness of growth; but Robert sighed with great satisfaction, when he settled down into the nest he forced into shape, bending the more pliable pieces out of the way. And so he sat and dozed, hour after hour, awaiting the passing of the expected storm.

CHAPTER XIV

SOUNDS OF PURSUIT — THE HOLLOW OAK

THE moon was still high above the horizon, doing her utmost to keep a luster on the sea and the tops of trees and hills, when the sun appeared, quickly overwhelming the soft night glow, and throwing its refulgency into the nooks and crannies of the forest. Robert had finally dropped into a sleep which lasted above two hours; and when his eyes opened to a renewed realization of his position, it was broad day. The croaking of the frogs in the marsh below, had largely ceased; but the birds had begun their twitter, and a mocking-bird eyed him from a perch on the oak above his head, and began to pipe his varied song.

Except for the sky, and the higher limbs of trees close to his thicket, Robert could see nothing of the region in which daybreak found him. And turn about, and to his satisfaction, he was invisible to any eyes that should not gain a vantage point high up — and the birds would not betray him. One bird after the other came to his tree and made his cry, or sang his tune, and so kept our fugitive in entertainment; till at last there came less cheering sounds, to set the birds in flight and Robert's heart to thumping.

Jarring voices of humans sounded from the west and south. Some one called out down by the marsh, and Robert heard Lafitte Goya's answer, at a point by the small stream that bordered the thicket. Directly, he heard several voices jabbering in Spanish right under his oak, just by the thicket, and his heart made a great bumping against his ribs in a sudden fear. What if they should see signs of him by the oak? He thought he heard some one climbing into the branches, and he crouched low in his nest. But the next moment the voices were going eastward around the thicket, presently to grow fainter, to the north.

What a great breath of relief came then! In five minutes all the human sounds died away; his pursuers were beating the bush over that last mile of island to the north and west. Robert judged that they would finally pass around to the east and go back south on the other side of the line of hills. Whether they would then give over the search for him for the present, he had no guess. At least he would play safe, and he determined to make a day of it in his present quarters, wherein he was scarcely able to stretch his legs, so close set were the withes about him.

With the relief that followed the passing of his pursuers, there came a reminder from his stomach; and he brought out of his pockets some of the bits of hard biscuits and canned meat he and Wayne had smuggled from the table. He ate rather sparingly, for there was no

telling when there was to be a replenishing of his pantry. He had neglected to put water in the canteen, so he tried to do with wanting it. But the ever increasing glow of the sun, and his noon meal, set a dryness in his throat that was more tormenting than hunger. He imagined, too, that he heard a purling in the stream not ten yards away.

As the hours went their snail's-pace, Robert's physical distresses multiplied; and the songs of the birds gave him no cheer. But when at last the evening shadows began to creep over the forest, he decided the time had come. So, after a few mouthsfull of food, he knotted the moss-wound rope to the suit-case, and began his ascent by his swinging ladder, to the oak limb. Then, perched up there, he hauled up the suit-case, which he again strapped to his back; and recovering his rope, he made his way to the ground outside the thicket once more.

He lay down at the edge of the stream and took a long draught of the water. And before setting off, he was careful to fill the canteen. Refreshed, he stepped out briskly to the north and east, for his purpose was to find some hidden, and otherwise suitable, place for setting up the wireless apparatus — some place offering a view of the sea to the north. He pushed forward with confidence, for he had had considerable experience out of doors, and had never been long stumped to find some means to his purpose, out of the materials furnished by nature.

After half an hour of cautious progress Robert had come to a spot well up on the ridge between two hill-tops,

from which the light of the setting sun had not gone. Crouched by a bush, he gave one reconnoitering look round, and then set off again down the other side of the hills, to the eastward. There remained to him yet near a half hour of fading daylight, and he meant to make the most of it. He hurried up to the north, passing among oaks, pines, and palms, and soon stood on the eastern slope of a bold hill that overlooked the sea at the north-east corner of the island.

A pair of live-oaks sent their branches wide. If he could but make a screened nest high in one of these! He climbed into the larger of the two. Well up, at a forking, he came upon the opening of a hollow. A few minutes with his knife at the rotted edge, and he had made the aperture wide enough to crawl in. So great a hollow, he thought, must go clear to the ground. Then it was to investigate at the bottom, outside. And so he went down again. And sure enough, screened by Spanish bayonet (clusters of long dagger-like leaves, keenly pointed) he discovered a lower opening; though his exploration was not without embarrassment, for this plant, having stilettoes for leaves, not only thoroughly screened the hole, but guarded it against any hasty approach. But Robert found that these horny spines were not proof against his knife, and he nipped off just enough of the lower ones; so that by flattening out on the ground, and progressing turtle-wise, he got himself into the aperture. Breaking down encroaching rotted masses, he crawled

within the big oak's trunk, and stood erect, looking up to where light showed through that upper port-hole at the forking. Two or three boys might crouch comfortably within the tree.

But dusk was on, and Robert had still many things to do. Next, it was to wriggle out under the bayonet-plant, make fast the suit-case to one end of the rope, climb to the fork with the other end, and haul up. Fortunately, live-oaks have a way of sending their great limbs out horizontally. So Robert, using pieces of rope for stays, propped the open suit-case into the shape of a platform. Then, though darkness was well on, he went again to the ground, and by dint of some hunting, and an economical use of his search-light, he got his hands on a good stick of hard-wood, which he hauled aloft and wedged across within the opening. This gave him a seat just far enough into the hollow to allow head and shoulders to be outside.

And now came the final bit of preparation for business — the stretching the aerial wires between a pair of the higher branches. This was the least of his difficulties; and long before the moon rose all was set for a trial.

Robert took his seat on the perch, head and shoulders out of the hole, the open suit-case before him, with the wires reaching aloft. The batteries seen to, he put on the receiver and seized the key. He breathed deeply, and his heart thumped as he hung between hope and fear. At last he was ready to make the attempt to send forth to,

and seize back a word from, his comrades on the schooner *Mercier*. He began moving the slide on the coil.

"RR, RR, RR; RM. RR, RR, RR, RM," he sent, time after time, and listened at each new position of the slide. Hour after hour, now, he kept it up. But he got no answer. Once he picked up wireless messages that were being exchanged between two vessels at sea. But from his friends on the *Mercier* not a sound.

All night Robert kept diligently at it. At various times the instrument responded to others on land and on sea; but from his comrades nothing. When day came he was loath to take down his aerial wires; but there was always the chance that Lafitte Goya or some of his men might suddenly appear on the scene. He packed all away and hung the suit-case within the hollow.

Before much light of day had come, he gathered handsfull of Spanish moss and hung festoons in a way to better screen his nest in the oak. His eyes began to wink for sleep; so, after a breakfast and a pull at his canteen, he put some knots in his rope; and, one end fast to a limb, and the other dangling in the hollow, he let himself down within his tree house to the bottom. And there, the door guarded by growing Spanish bayonets, he curled up on a bed of moss and slept. In spite of his disappointment of failure, his sleep was sound.

Robert's awakening was sudden; his faculties were all alive in a flash. Human voices sounded at the very door of his cell. From the sound some one must be close

enough to be pricked by the Spanish bayonet plant. Robert crouched, motionless, holding his breath, gripped with the fear that some mark had betrayed his retreat. Then at last the voices moved away, soon out of hearing. Anxiously he seized on his rope, and, digging his toes into the soft interior walls of his oak, began to ascend.

Cautiously he put his head out at the upper opening, and peering through the interstices, he soon discovered Gomez and one other, a hundred feet to the west, and climbing toward the brow of the hill. When at last the two figures attained the top, they stood some minutes looking all about; and Robert was fully conscious it was trace of him they looked for. And he found much satisfaction in the thought that they had been so close in their pursuit, for they were the less likely to come soon again to the same spot. The men hovered on the hill-top but a few minutes, and then disappeared down the other side.

Now, Robert was assailed by the temptation to risk a sally from his cover, to make sure the enemy should take themselves well out of the region. So down the rope he went, and wormed his way out under his Spanish bayonet guard. Dashing from bush to bush, he soon made the brow of the hill. Lying flat behind a small screen of growth, he shot his eyes down into the pine forest, and in among the palms mingling on the shore side. Then first one figure, then the other, appeared in an open bit. As Robert watched, from time to time they would appear, to be lost again among the trees; till at last they disap-

peared for good behind the main ridge of hills pointing to the northwest.

Robert turned back down the hillside, breathing deeply of gratification; for he felt it would be some time, at the worst, till he would be disturbed again by the hunters; and he was growing eager for another trial at the wireless. The sun was already past the zenith, the day over half gone. He went for his canteen, and filled it at a spring, a hundred yards to the south; and he gathered a pint of blueberries from the hillside, to round off his monotonous diet of hard bread and spoiling meat.

CHAPTER XV

THE WIRELESS WRECKED — THE CAVE

ROBERT'S next act was to search out material to improve his seat aloft in the oak. And when he had made the climb again by his inner stairway — which he had come to prefer to the outer steps, by the branches — there was soon wedged in place another stick, beside the first, making him an infinitely more comfortable chair.

After a careful scanning of the region against possible unwelcome lookers-on, he hung his aerial wires up between branches again, this time winding the more exposed parts with bits of the abundant Spanish moss. And now, seated with head and shoulders out of the hollow, the open suit-case and instrument before him, and the receiver to his ear, Robert began to work the key, listening in from time to time. And again all he got was some fragments of some foreign message, that he did not care to hear.

Near two hours passed thus.

Then at last came something that set him all atingle.

"RM RM RM, RR," it came.

It was the *Mercier* at last!

"You, Ray?" Robert sent.

"Yes, Slicky," came Ray's answer.

"Julian, Loyo, dead. Wayne prisoner. I escaped." Thus went Robert's next communication.

"Understand. Where are you?" came back.

"Small island. From Dry Tortugas SW by W half —"

A rope stay gave way, and suit-case, instrument and all toppled off the limb, and parts went tumbling to the ground; other parts hung swinging by the aerial wires, amongst them two binding-posts, pulled out of the cells. Frantically Robert hurried down, collected the pieces of wreck, and sought to make repair. But it was no use, the binding-posts refused to connect.

Just eight letters more would have done the business, and he would have completed all that he had considered essential to guide the *Mercier* to the island.

Poor Robert again tackled the thing, and worked long for a remedy, but had finally to give it up. If only Wayne were there! There seemed but the one chance — to get Wayne to the wireless. Doubtless, Wayne was now being kept under the closest guard, and to try to effect his escape would prove as awkward as the making a silk purse of a sow's ear. But there was nothing else worth considering. He could at least crawl close to the house in the dark — he was sure he could so far evade a sentinel — and then he would signal Wayne through the wall. There was the chance, of course, of his being recaptured; but even that were better than not to communi-

cate with Wayne at all; and the situation would hardly be much worse.

And so at last he came to the determination. The wireless was all tucked away, and the suit-case hung within the oak. And then began the wait for night. The moon was due to rise about ten o'clock; and not to risk exposure in the moonlight, Robert meant to make his attempt during the spell of darkness that just preceded the moon's coming.

When dusk finally spread among the trees, he set out. Crossing the hills by the way he had come, he turned south on the western side of the ridge. Within the hour he had come to the bit of stream just north of the house, and creeping amongst the last scraps of underbrush, he strained his eyes in the dark, and cocked his ear. There wasn't a sound but the distant croaking of the bullfrogs.

He stole forward cautiously. Finally he touched the very back wall of the house. He moved to the corner. There was no rustle, or cough, or other sign of a sentry. He put his ear to the wall, close to which the bed stood — not the faintest sound of breathing within. And no light shone through the window on the side. He knocked gently — no response. Again — no response. And Wayne, even in deepest sleep, was sensitive to the slightest signal. Robert slipped around to the front of the structure. No sign of occupancy there. Carefully he tried the door. It opened, and he went in. For a moment he stood and listened. Again no sound. He

risked a flash of his lamp, for a suspicion was on him. The room was empty. He went into the next chamber. A flash showed it also abandoned. Wayne was gone. Even the leather chest had been taken away. The whole place was deserted.

"They've taken Wayne over to the men's bunk-house," was Robert's thought.

There was nothing to do but reconnoiter the bunk-house; and that must be quickly, for the moon was soon due; and except for a few palms, there would be no shadows to hide one creeping about the men's domicile. Robert hurried eastward through the wood; and when he came opposite the long building, he stopped only a moment to strain his eyes in the dark for a possible sentry, then darted over to the shelter covering the dining-tables.

He heard the harsh sounds of numerous sleepers, but nothing to give him any inkling where Wayne could be in that building; for his immediate purpose was to signal him through the wall. No light shone in the two windows on this, the north side, and he made the circuit of the whole in the hope that some other window would offer him a glimmering as to conditions within. But it was all as dark as a mole's burrow; and so, for the time at least, he must give over his hope to communicate with Wayne. And now the warning shimmer of the moon gave direction to his movements.

Before making his hurry scurry for the wood, Robert

crept into the cook-shanty and secured some bits of food, and a draught from the coffee-pot. The moon topped the horizon before he got well into the shelter of the trees. To find a close-screened nest in the underbrush was no difficult task; but there came no sleep to ameliorate the tedium of the long wait, till hours past midnight. And then he slept, as it were, with one eye open, not to let the sun catch him unawares; for he meant to have a look on all that would be going forward so soon as the men should be on the stir.

When the first glimmering showed on the eastern watery horizon, Robert was alert again. By the time the old Spanish cook set his fire going in the cook-house, Robert had planted himself within some brush overlooking the house. When the men sat down to their meal, he saw that Wayne was not among them; nor was the snaky, skulking Gomez. But Robert made out the Englishman, Norris, at the long table; though he seemed like a rank outsider amongst that ill-complexioned crew, and appeared to hold himself aloof from any part in the table tattle.

The men finally set their pipes going, and Robert could see Lafitte Goya, with gesticulation, ordering them on the move. They went north toward the hills, eight in all, this time unburdened with pick or shovel, though one carried a hamper; and it appeared Goya alone was armed: he carried a rifle, and hung to his belt was a pair of pistols and a sheath-kife.

For an hour after the procession disappeared, Robert watched for glimpse of some others besides the cook about the house. If Gomez was there guarding Wayne, it seemed incredible he would fail to show himself sometime within the hour. The suspense irked him, and he must know how things stood in that bunk-house. So he made a detour to the west, scampered along the beach to the front of the house, and thus kept out of view of the cook, busied at the back. Then, crawling up by the shell pile, he hurried to the front door, standing open. Cautiously he peered in — no one visible — then slipped within. It took but a few moments to satisfy himself of the astounding fact that Wayne was not there.

But as he was creeping among the beds, he heard the old mumbling cook at the back door. He had hardly time to roll himself into a corner, under a bed, before the lumbering step of the man came along, creaking the floor. He shuffled about, throwing the beds into semi-order, and then went out again.

Robert crawled forth and got himself back the way he had come. And he sat down in a nook of the forest, to endeavor to adjust his mind to the new and somewhat puzzling state of affairs. Since his discovery that Wayne was gone from the little house, he hadn't entertained a doubt but that he was in this latter lodging. And now what could have become of him? There must still be some other retreat under Goya's use; and Robert recollected Gomez's absence from the company; and the basket

borne by one of the men. Reasonably, this meant breakfast for Gomez and his prisoner. Ah! then he knew what must be the next step forward. And he set about making it.

Within the wood, Robert found an apparently new-made trail going toward the north. With a sharp eye and ear forward, he followed its windings among the hodge-podge of growths, for nearly half a mile, and came to the first hill. The path took him a bit to the left, and then came to an abrupt end, between that hill and the next; the second hill rising higher, and right here more sheer. It seemed as if those using this trail had — for some reason or other — habitually made this the point of branching out into various directions. Perhaps — so reasoned Robert — the purpose was to conceal the place to which the path had begun to mark the way; and these various routes, of which there were no distinctive traces, converged at the place concealed.

Casting about for some pointer, Robert finally made out some irregular signs of passage eastward, between the hills; and eventually they got him well up the eastern slope of the bigger hill, among the bushes.

Robert was scanning the region for other signs, when suddenly Gomez appeared, popping, like a Jack in a box, out of a clump not thirty yards away. Robert threw himself down amongst the grass, and cautiously peering forth, his eyes followed the form of the Spaniard, going down among the trees toward the shore. It was then he

caught, faintly, voices coming from down that way.

But he must find out what Gomez did in the bushes from which he had so suddenly burst forth. It took but a minute to reach the spot, and Robert was not a little astounded — to look into a black hole, little broader than would accommodate a bear, going right into the hill. He felt that at last he was on the way to discovering the whereabouts of Wayne. But considering it hardly safe as yet to venture inside, since Gomez might at any moment be back again, he determined next to see what was going on down shoreward. The undergrowth offered plenty of concealment, and it was not five minutes till he came close enough for a view of the field.

In the grove of hard-woods, interspersed with coconut and other palms, the men were delving with shovels; and scattered about were a number of prospect holes, apparently abandoned. Some of the tree-trunks about showed marks of old blazings. "Hunting for the treasure," said Robert to himself. And it seemed to him the diggers' enthusiasm had pretty much run out, for they worked very much like men making ditch on small wages. Lafitte Goya, however, appeared to be urging them on, himself not disdaining to wield a shovel, by way of example.

Robert hung on and off the place till evening, when the men struck off work. And he watched Gomez to that hole in the hill, where he went boldly in, to come out in ten minutes, bearing the basket. Gomez joined the

others as they marched south, toward their night quarters.

For two hours after night-fall, Robert crouched in the bushes, close to that hole; for he must make sure Gomez would not return. Then he crawled into the den, from outer obscurity to inner blackness. He had not far to go till he found the passage begin to widen and grow higher, allowing him to stand. Warily he crept forward, flashing his electric lamp, when he thought needful, on the stalactites and stalagmites, and masses that appeared like snowdrifts. He came to a meeting with a lesser gallery from the right; but he held on to the left, ever moving at a snail's pace, in the widening passage. Then at last he turned a corner, and a dim light partially illumined the walls ahead. He crouched behind an irregularity and scrutinized the space.

The light came from a lantern on a box. Pallets showed on the floor, one against either wall. Sounds of sleepers came from that on the right. On the left a figure moved restlessly, and in a few minutes arose to a sitting posture; and there came the rattle of a chain. Then Robert saw that it was Wayne, and he hurried forward. Wayne recognized him, and put a warning finger to his lips. That moment there came the sound of some one moving up the passage, and Wayne had barely time to tuck Robert out of sight under a blanket, when the sentry appeared.

CHAPTER XVI

DOINGS ON THE *MERCIER*

RAY REID and Captain Jean Marat clung to the south beach of that little island of the Florida coast for some hours following the sailing away of the *Miguel*, bearing Wayne and Robert. They kindled a fire, for cheer. And as the light of day crept over the sea, they watched the schooner as it moved southward, to note any change of its course; till finally it disappeared below the rim of the horizon.

“She go direc’ to the south,” said Marat at last. “Ah, thad Goya he theenk we wadch; and w’en we cannod wadch more, he change thee course maybe.”

“He looked like a sly gink,” observed Ray.

When Marat and Ray again got aboard the *Mercier*, breakfast waited. The meal was not a gay affair, following so closely on the departure of two of the company on so uncertain a venture. Even Ray’s spirit melted into the general gloom.

Finally came some discussion relative to the ultimate and mysterious goal of the *Miguel*. That the schooner would go round the end of Florida to the east was set down as beyond probability, for Jean Marat held that in

that direction Pedro Lamartine could not long have held secret his pearling grounds; that way every region was much travelled.

"Well," blurted Phil, "why couldn't we have taken a chance and followed in sight of the *Miguel*?"

"Well, say!" and Ray's eyes went wide in astonishment. "Phil, you're sure bit by the sleeping-bug. So long as we're in sight of the *Miguel*, that Lafitte Goya pirate isn't going to keep on the right course and show us the way. He'd dodge around till he shook us. And where would Wayne and Slicky be then, trying to keep track of the way they go? Here, have some coffee, and spit the sand out of your eyes."

When Rufe had finally cleared the table of dishes, the chart was got out, and studied for places out of the beaten track, which might be likely pearling grounds. For everything known of old Pedro Lamartine pointed to the reasonable certainty that his seat had proven a rich gem mine, and that for a considerably number of years.

"Well," said Joe Hunt, "where are the *known* pearl fisheries?"

"It is said," began Jean Marat, "some of the bes' place' is in Bay of Panama."

"But that's over on the Pacific side of Central America," offered Charlie Manners.

"I hear it many time' said," went on Marat, "they fin' ver' much pearl by some of these island', here," (pointing on the chart) "down by South America."

"Do you think Pedro Lamartine's place is that far?" asked Leslie.

"*Non*," asserted Marat, "eet can nod be so far as thad."

"It might be any old place this side," suggested Ray.

"Yes," assented Captain Marat. "Yes, and it ver' sure some place new, w'at other people have not find."

"Maybe it's down here," suggested Bert Hill, "among these islands close to the south end of Florida."

"It ees possib'," agreed Marat, "but I theenk it more far as thad."

"It looks like," observed Ray, "from all these dots of islands, it must be a great place to play hide and seek."

"Yes," said Marat, "it ees plenty place to hide there. Bud I never hear they fin' ver' many pearl in such place. Anyway we can nod be so sure."

The discussion finally ended with the decision to cruise among the keys off Florida, until such time as they could hope for some wireless communication from Wayne and Robert. So at about eleven o'clock, it was up anchor and make sail.

At dusk the *Mercier* passed Cape Sable; and when it fell quite dark, the anchor was let go some miles to the southeast of the cape.

Early the following day the *Mercier* found herself among the keys, beating about with much shifting of canvas, and zigzagging to avoid the shoals. It was the beginning of a period of vagabondry. There was fish-

ing, and crabbing on the beaches, with turtle-turning at night. Oysters were plentiful, and the oyster knives were brought to play, and many eyes were set keen for pearls. But not one did they find. They came upon several parties in sloops, whom they questioned for news of the *Miguel*. None had seen the schooner.

On the third day, convinced that the region knew nothing of the *Miguel*, our sailors set the course to the west. Ray put up his aerial wires, and thereafter, night and day, there was some one at the wireless during the half of every hour. For several days, thus, the wireless was watched for sparks of news from Wayne and Robert. The *Mercier* passed to the north of the Marquesas Keys, and continued to dawdle along, praying for a word that should point a definite course.

Then came that night in which Robert, in his oak on the Pearl Isle, labored at his key — reaching out for the *Mercier*. Bert was at the wireless till midnight, when he was relieved by Phil. But Phil wanted patience in a pursuit of so much uncertainty; and it was doubtless because of his half-hearted attention to the instrument, that the *Mercier* failed to pick up Robert's call.

Joe Hunt was having his turn in the clutches of the receiver — the wireless installed on a box at the foot of the mainmast — when Rufe called to him from the galley:

“Dey ain' no news yit, Joe?”

“Not a thing, Rufe,” said Joe.

The others (except Leslie at the wheel, and Charlie up forward) were at breakfast; a somber crew, and silent, till Rufe's query stirred the thing that was the load on their spirits.

"Something's sure happened to them," said Phil. "That Goya's discovered the wireless, or something."

"Don't croak, Phil!" scolded Ray, resenting in another the voicing of the very fear that was seeking to get the better of himself. "We're going to hear from them yet. It might not be so easy for them to find a chance; but you bet! Wayne and Slicky'll find it."

It was so he put a bolster to his own hope.

"Ray!" hailed Joe. "Here's something! Come, quick!"

Ray knocked over his stool, and in another moment was jamming on the receiver, crouching at the instrument. The others flocked about, eagerly attentive.

"It's Slicky!" said Ray, eyes staring as he listened. Grasping the key, he sent: "RM, RM, RM: RR." Then he spoke out Robert's words—"You, Ray?" And after his answer back, he again interpreted aloud—"Julian, Loyo, dead. Wayne prisoner. I escaped."

The astounded crew shook under the news, but held their breaths as Ray sent:

"Understand. Where are you?" And once again he spoke out the reply: "Small island. From Dry Tortugas SW by W half—" And there he stopped.

“Something went wrong,” said Ray. “He didn’t finish.”

But he continued to listen for a resumption of the message. Nothing came. For a long time he clung to the instrument, finally relinquishing the receiver to Joe.

In the meantime, the others moved aft to discuss the news. Jean Marat dropped into a chair by the table.

“Ver’ bad news,” said he. “Ver’ bad.”

“Does you say mah li’le Julian am daid?” came from black Rufus, and tears were in his voice. “Ah cain’t believe dat.—No sah.—Dat sho is some mistake. Ah be’n a-seein’ him in mah sleep — jes’ as plain! Dat sho is some mistake.”

“Well, Rufe,” said Charlie, “we’re going to go and find out. We’ve something to go on now. Haven’t we, Captain Marat?”

“Yes,” said Marat. “Thad message w’at we get tell ver’ much. We can not go wrong more than by one point of the compass.”

Captain Marat produced the chart, which he spread on the table.

“Ver’ well,” he began. “The message — so much w’at we get — say, ‘From Dry Tortugas southwest by west half —.’ If the message be complete it would say, ‘southwest by west half *west*’; or it would say, ‘southwest by west half *south*.’ ”

Then producing his pencil, he drew a compass, and

taking the Dry Tortugas Islands as the common starting point, he extended two lines on the chart, corresponding to the two possible directions, which lines ended some way apart, on the coast of Central America.

"Now," he said, "one of them line' go by thad 'small island' we like to fin'."

"Then," broke in Ray, "all we have to do is to follow those lines — first one, then t'other — till we come to it."

"Yes," said Jean Marat.

"Hooray!" shouted Phil.

"But," said Ray, "the chart doesn't show any islands on either line."

"No," agreed Captain Marat, "but here is ver' many coral reef' show on thee more south line — the island maybe ver' small."

"Then shall we try the south line first?" said Ray.

"I theenk," concluded Marat.

So Captain Marat relieved Leslie of the wheel, and set the *Mercier* on a course calculated to bring her to the Dry Tortugas Islands. In the meantime the boys collected forward to discuss Robert's laconic message more at length, especially that which lay between the words of it.

"Well," said Leslie, "it proves that that Goya wasn't as friendly as he pretended to be."

"Yes," said Ray. "All he wants is that treasure Pedro Lamartine hid. And he hasn't found it, for he'd hike out in a minute to get where he could spend it."

"And it looks like he has a poor chance to find it, with

Loyo dead," offered Joe; "for, according to old Pedro's writing, Loyo was the only one who knew how to find it."

"I wonder how Julian and Loyo died?" queried Bert.

"Well," said Ray, "maybe Loyo *was* sick, like Goya said; and then it wouldn't be strange that he should die. But Julian too — it looks kind of queer."

"You don't suppose Goya made away with them?" ventured Charlie.

"I don't see what he would gain by that, before finding the treasure," said Joe, "seeing that Loyo was the only one with any information as to how to locate it."

"Well," said Ray, "there's no use guessing about it. But I wonder just what they want to hold Wayne and Slicky prisoners for."

"Maybe this Goya found out they were up to something," said Joe.

"Of course," assented Ray. "But I wish Slicky would get the wireless going again."

"Maybe he got caught while he was sending," suggested Bert.

This surmise sickened the boys of the discussion, and incontinently, each turned to other employment.

The middle of the afternoon brought the *Mercier* in view of Bird Key and Loggerhead Key, of the Dry Tortugas. Then Captain Marat laid the course SW by W $\frac{1}{2}$ S.

And now followed a new period, made of fair winds

and weather, and much of what the boys in their impatience considered unfair winds and weather; till one night at about ten o'clock, Joe, on the watch in the bows, lifted his voice to Ray, at the wheel.

"A light on the port bow!" he called.

"A light on the port bow!" Ray repeated in high tones.

The sleepers were instantly up from their pallets.

Captain Marat climbed to the fore cross-trees. "Set her one point to thee south!" he called down to Ray. "Now — so! Leslie, take thee wheel!" he called again. "Ray, come aloft weeth one lantern."

Ray was soon clinging to the mast-head beside Marat, and swinging a lantern. The light discovered by Joe shone about four miles to the southward; and presently Ray and Marat saw it go out and gleam forth again a number of times in succession. Ray covered and uncovered his lantern repeatedly, in like manner of signaling.

"It's their beacon!" he called down to the anxious boys on the deck. "It's the boys at last!"

CHAPTER XVII

JULIAN AND LOYO

IT will be remembered, that on the morning when Robert's flight was discovered, Goya, to make sure of his remaining prisoner, had the lad bound to a chair, and set a guard over him, while the rest went off in pursuit of Robert.

All day Wayne sat thus trussed up. And it was not till midday that his guard saw fit to offer him a bit of food and drink, brought over by the old cook, out of whose hands he must pick his sustenance, like a bird.

When the men returned at night, Wayne found comfort in the signs of defeat; and he knew that the hunt for Robert had failed. It showed particularly in Lafitte Goya's demeanor. And it was with a vicious jerk he tested the bonds on the boy's wrists, before ordering him to be led forward on the way to the men's quarters. But he was again given food, his hands released; and the end of a light boat-chain was secured to his ankle, the link pounded fast with a hammer; the thing done under the eye and sinister grin of Lafitte Goya.

Soon Wayne was in the middle of a little procession, making through the woods toward the hills. Lafitte

Goya — much armed — went before, and Gomez came after, holding to the chain, which clanked at every step the boy took. The first hill passed, the little caravan approached the sheer wall of the next; and directly, Wayne was a good deal astounded, on coming out of a bit of brush, to be thrust into the mouth of a cave.

At a call from Goya a lantern appeared, in the hand of a sentinel, who illumined the way to a narrow point of the passage, where he took station, while the others went round a corner and into a space of greater extent, like a room. Goya took the free end of the chain and passed it round a tall stalagmite; and a hammer came into play again, closing the final link into the bight. After a word to Gomez, Lafitte Goya disappeared.

There is something peculiarly dispiriting in the damp atmosphere of a dungeon. From the moment that black hole in the hill gaped to receive Wayne, and for the short space when the one dominant sound was the clanking of the chain on his leg, racking thoughts teemed within him. It seemed as if the sunshine and the fair face of the earth was forever set behind him, was never again to gladden his heart. There arose in his mind a picture of the two graves of Julian and Loyo, and he set beside them a third — freshly made, a mound of newly turned sand. And then his thoughts went far away, and he saw his mother and father, and he sorrowed for them. For he knew how fondly they looked forward to the coming of him whom they were never to see again. In all his heart-

ache for those others, there was little room for sorrowing for himself, and he forgot his personal dread of that third grave, which might be even now in the digging. And so, in the grip of such bitter musings, Wayne was ill-prepared for the revelation making ready to burst upon him.

Gomez had just finished taking away some movables from next to the wall, and had set the lantern on a box near the middle of the grotto, so that it lent of its feeble beams to all parts; and he too went back down the passage. It was then Wayne, out of the tail of his eye, sensed a living something over against the opposite wall. Quickly he turned, and found himself gazing on the face of a lad some years older than himself, and who was returning his look with a wonder in the eyes matching his own marvelling. The lad sat among blankets thrown on the floor. And Wayne, with more difficulty, discerned a black face, resting on an improvised pillow.

It came all over Wayne in a warm glow of realization. It was Julian Lamartine, and Loyo! They were not, then, moldering in those two graves, as Gomez had nursed him into believing. But they were alive, and confined now in this black hole with himself.

A great warmth surged within him. Capacity for happiness is not a fixed thing, conditioned as it is on attendant circumstances. Sad indeed as was Wayne's situation — chained to a rock pillar in a dungeon, and the outcome uncertain — this new state of mind, coming on

this wonderful revelation, was as Paradise compared to the rack upon which his affections had just now been stretched.

Wayne moved as close to the others as his chain permitted.

“Are you Julian?” he murmured.

“Yes,” said the other lad, simply, his eyes still looking their wonder.

Thus began the low-toned converse, with explanations and mutual confidences, that lasted away into the night — as time went, for anything but night never penetrated this place. There was but one interruption — when one of the Spaniards came bearing the leathern chest, so that Wayne might have out his blankets, to make his own bed. There was apparently no purpose to prevent communication between the prisoners, since doubtless it was considered they were in no condition to embarrass Goya’s activities; and it may also have been in Goya’s mind that the lads might chance to let slip some word that would reveal some clue to the location of the treasure that was his one sole aim and worship.

Julian Lamartine found much joy in the tidings that his grandfather was alive and waiting for him, and was greatly impressed by Wayne’s account of the contents of the letter addressed to him by old Pedro; and expressed much gratitude over the enterprise undertaken by the boys, with the purpose to seek him out and help him back into his own.

Julian Lamartine's story of all those years of virtual imprisonment has already been outlined. He recounted that night — he a wee fellow — when his grandfather had permitted him to remain at the home of Henri Lamartine: how in the night he had been awakened by a noise, and he had slipped out of bed and run to the foot of the stairs, to find Pedro Lamartine stooping over the body of Henri in the candle-light; how Pedro had seized on him, and took up a tin box, and fled out of the house; how Pedro had rowed across the river and taken him to a room, and locked him in; and later, how he found himself on the sea in a ship, in time carried ashore on this island. He told how he had always held the belief that Pedro had stricken down Henri Lamartine, but that Pedro had forbidden any reference to the past, and had himself made just one reference to his grandfather, and that was to put an end to the matter with a veiled hint that he was dead and gone. And Pedro, especially of late, had intimated that if Julian was good and patient, he was to become very wealthy. He had shown a growing regard for Julian. From his voyages away he had brought him toys, and school books, from which he and Loyo had taught him to read. Julian's years of life on the island had not been quite void of pleasures; and he had taken interest in the pearl fishing; and he had been permitted to help Pedro and Loyo to extract the gems — none of the others was allowed to have a hand in this work.

But troubles finally came. Loyo, who was a big black giant of a fellow, finally discovered Gomez and another in the act of secretly taking out pearls; and he took up the two in his hands and cracked their heads together. And when Pedro sailed away to a Central American port in search of some Japanese divers, to take the places of two who were to return to their homes across the Pacific, Gomez deserted from the schooner. And when Pedro had again sailed to market with some pearls and a load of shell, there appeared from the west an open sailboat, bearing Gomez and four strangers: Lafitte Goya, two other Spaniards, and an English-speaking man — Norris.

Loyo had latterly suffered yearly attacks of rheumatism; and now, when these strangers came, he was hardly able to hobble about — much less deal with them. Somewhat over a week before it came time for Loyo to sail with a load of shell, to meet Pedro Lamartine at the rendezvous, Loyo became so helpless as to be unable to leave his bed. Julian had the poor darky carried from his bunk in the men's quarters to the smaller building, where he could nurse him.

And then immediately it became evident that this Lafitte Goya had gained influence over the men, excepting the two Jap divers, who remained loyal to their employer, and who brought to Julian and Loyo news of Goya's doings. It developed that Gomez had some kind of knowledge of a weight of treasure hidden on the island by

Pedro Lamartine, and Lafitte Goya promised the men a liberal share when the hoard should be discovered. Very soon the two friendly Japs ceased to appear, and Julian made sure that they had been done away with. And at last matters came to a climax. Lafitte Goya appeared, Gomez slinking behind him, and demanded of Loyo directions for locating the treasure. And Loyo had come back with the answer that if he knew he should refuse to tell.

“Loyo glared at the man,” said Julian, “and gritted his teeth; and if he had not been bound down by his sickness, I know he would have taken that Goya and Gomez in his two fists and cracked their heads together as he had done for Gomez before.”

Here Julian reached over and stroked Loyo's bony black face with his hand.

“When they had gone, poor Loyo lay silent for some time; and finally he called me to him, saying he had something to tell me. He then told how Pedro had confided to him that he had been laying away money and the choicest of the pearls, intended for me at his death. And he told me of a secret drawer set into the wall back of Pedro's bunk in the cabin of the *Mercier*, and the same in the *Miguel*, in either of which — depending on which schooner Pedro should be when he died — there would be a letter to Loyo, telling how the hiding-place of the treasure was to be found. Then Loyo became thoughtful again. It seemed like he was trying to think out

how he was to tell me what more he had to say. And during that quiet time I heard a sound of something rubbing against the wall by the window. I hurried over and stuck out my head just in time to see Gomez slink round the corner of the house.

"I didn't tell Loyo about it. And then he asked me to leave him alone for a little while. So I took up the pail and went back to the spring for some fresh water. I looked about for a sight of Gomez, but saw nothing of him.

"But when I was coming back, I saw that sneaking form hurrying from the house toward the thick woods. His actions alarmed me, and I hurried in to Loyo. I found Loyo unconscious, and I saw blood on the pillow, and found where he had been struck on the side of the head; and there was a place broken in. Loyo was still breathing. I put on a bandage; it was the only thing I knew to do. I watched all night and the next day, no one to turn to for help. The cook came with food, and set it in the next room. But I couldn't eat. That next night Loyo opened his eyes; but he appeared to have lost his mind. I talked to him; but he didn't seem to hear what I said. I finally wrote words on paper, which he looked at; but he didn't seem to make them out. I saw that he knew me, but otherwise his mind was all blank. And he is still the same, though he is quickly growing stronger, and often puts his hands up to his head, as if it pained."

"Did Goya come in again?" asked Wayne.

"Yes," said Julian, "he came and looked at Loyo, and tried to talk with him. And he laughed when he saw his condition. The next time I looked out on the lagoon, the *Miguel* was gone, and I saw only two of the men. In about a week, the *Miguel* came back, and Goya unloaded the shells. They searched about the place for some days, digging in some spots, and then sailed away in the *Miguel* again.

"When the *Miguel* came back this last time, Goya came ashore and immediately had us taken to this cave."

And so ended Julian Lamartine's story. Much as Wayne yearned to give Julian the bit of cheer that would come of the telling him of the existence of the wireless, and Robert's probable doings, he was careful not so much as to whisper anything that was not already known to Lafitte Goya. For he could not know that Gomez was not skulking somewhere within earshot, in the hope that he might hear something that should help in the hunt that was going forward with such ill success.

For two days Wayne continued to languish in that subterranean hole with his fellow prisoners. Julian, at times, would give voice to the wish that Goya might find the treasure; for then he hoped that this confinement might end, and they should be set ashore somewhere on the mainland, whence they might pick their way to their friends. But Wayne would shake his head, thus only showing that he had hope of a better outcome than that.

Then came the night when Robert suddenly appeared, creeping in on the scene, and was thrust out of view under Wayne's blanket, as the sentry came forward on his round.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE *MERCIER* COMES

THE sentinel, trailing a rifle by its strap, came forward, sent his eyes about in the dimness, and examined the fetter on Wayne's ankle. Then—"Go sleep," he said. Doubtless, he reasoned a sleeping prisoner betokened a nap for the guard.

Wayne made as if to comply. And the Spaniard went lumbering back round the corner to the narrows of the passage, where he lay himself across the way, evidently meaning to lose as little rest as may be.

Wayne lost no time in getting himself under the blanket with Robert, head and all. And then there began a council in whispers. Because of the chance of further interruption, Robert wasted no words in recounting the progress he had made in communication with the *Mercier*, and how the accident with the wireless had come just as he was about to flash to their comrades the few final words of the message that was to direct them to the islands.

"Well," said Wayne, "what you sent them is only half a point off; and you got in the word 'half,' so they'll know it's just a half point either one way or the other. And then we may have missed it that much anyway. The

distance is the only thing really left out, and it couldn't be any farther than to the coast somewhere."

"But," argued Robert, "it would be a good thing if you could get the wireless going again."

"My ankle is chained," said Wayne. "But the link could be bent open if we had something to do it with."

"We'll try my pocket knife," said Robert.

"But then," reasoned Wayne, "when they find out I'm gone, they'll drop everything and hunt for us till they find us."

"Well, I'll stay here," said Robert. "There isn't enough light for them to see the difference."

And finally Robert had his way of it; and the boys began preparing for the swap in situations. Robert crawled to the bend in the passage, and listening, heard the heavy breathing of the sleeping watch. Then back to Wayne, and feeling out the end link, he set his knife blade in and pried. But it refused to give. He then began to search in the space for some other tool, finally risking a trip down close to the sleeping guard; and by a careful use of his flash lamp he finally got his eye on the hammer that had been used in setting the link together. It was a claw-hammer, and with pushing both knife-blade and a claw of the hammer into the link, it was at last opened sufficiently to allow disconnection; and Wayne's ankle was freed.

The chain then was set around Robert's ankle, and the link got together as much as might be without noise

of pounding. Wayne then gathered into his pocket some remains of supper; and the two got their heads under the blanket for a last word.

"Keep to the right," said Robert; "it isn't far to the opening. You'll find the oak easy; it's on the east side of the hill, and a Spanish Bayonet bush just in front of the hollow."

"I'll find it," said Wayne. "And now, Slicky, I'm sure they'll find the way here; and we'll manage somehow to get you and Julian and Loyo out of here soon after they come."

"I know," returned Robert. "Just you try and get the wireless going. It was my carelessness that caused the tumble."

"Not a bit," declared Wayne. "Well, I'm going."

And so Wayne went groping up the dark passage, a hand on the wall, till he got round a bend, where he could risk an occasional flash of Robert's lamp. And soon he found himself out under the stars and the now rising moon. He went north, keeping within the edge of the forest, the beach on his right; and before midnight, he was at the foot of the last hill, showing under the soft moonlight; and he made out those two oaks of Robert's, just ahead.

It required but little labor and as little time to find the Spanish Bayonet plant, and a minute to squirm his way in to the hollow behind. Directly, the rope ladder was in his hand, and he began to climb. And next, he was

seated on the improvised perch within the top of the hollow, and got his hand on the suit-case, where it hung within. To get the canteen filled with fresh water, was his next care. And when he got back, he began to set the suit-case on the limb in the way Robert had described.

The climbing moon gave Wayne more and more light. He struggled with the binding-posts till he thought they should hold in place and work for a time, only to find that two cells had run out by an accidental short-circuiting, and could be mended only with new ones. But all this gave him no very great hurt; for, as he had told Robert, Robert's message had, after all, given the *Mercier's* crew sufficient to direct their course right enough.

So now all there was left to do was to watch for a vessel's light at sea, by night; by day, for a sail. Wayne put away the wireless; and hour after hour, he sat there, scanning the sea at intervals. Towards morning, he went down by the rope to the bottom of the hollow, where he gave himself up to a couple of hours' sleep.

The whole of the next day passed with not a sail in sight. The region was but little travelled, because of the dangerous reefs that pock-marked the sea for many miles around.

Night came again, and Wayne clung to his perch, trying to buoy his hope as he watched for a gleam on the sea. He talked to himself, in a way of soothing a child, promising that the *Mercier* would be sure to come to-night; and then, in a second thought, and by way of pro-

viding against disappointment — “Well, she’ll show up by tomorrow anyway.” And so it went for a couple of hours of the night, which was very warm, and growing in sultriness, where he sat in the oak, protected by the hill from a dwindling westerly breeze.

He set his eyes for another look seaward. Then his heart made a great leap, and went jumping at a pace. A red light showed to the north of him. Ever so faint it was, and it went out. But it came again.

“It’s the *Mercier*!” he said aloud. And he stood up on the perch.

The next moment, Wayne fairly tumbled down the hollow of the oak, and got a penal pricking of the Spanish bayonet plant, as with too great haste he made his way out. He went at the gathering of dried twigs and branches to a spot near the brow of the hill; and there he set a fire going. Armful after armful he piled beside his beacon. In ten minutes he saw a green light flash into view. “They are turning this way!” he cried. And then directly, he noted a white light going up higher than the green and red.

He tore off his jacket and held it before the fire. Then swung it off and on, letting out flashes of light. He was answered on the vessel. There was no mistake, it was the *Mercier*. Then he stood, entranced with joy, as he watched the lights steadily growing in distinctness. He piled on the wood, and the schooner came straight on. He strained his eyes as she came close, and forgot to flash

warning of the reefs, till suddenly a squall broke out of the east, and the schooner came with a rush, straight for the line of breakers.

Wayne rushed down to the shore, and he signalled with his flashlight. But in the confusion on board, of taking in sail, his tardy warning was not read in time; and the *Mercier* struck hard aground, a quarter mile from the beach.

Fortunately, the squall quickly passed, and was followed by a light, steady breeze. And soon a boat, bearing Ray, Joe, and Captain Marat, came over the lagoon, making direct towards Wayne.

He waded into the water as the boat came up, and seized hold of the bow. And at once, he felt himself in the grip of the three of his comrades, on the beach.

"We were mighty glad to see your light," and "Ah! Thees is great pleasure!" and "Where's Slicky?" All spoke at once. Then questions about the accident to the wireless, and regarding the manner of the deaths of Julian and Loyo, came in a second outburst, before Wayne could find a word. All climbed into the boat; and on the way back to the *Mercier*, Wayne began some disjointed explanations to the three, finally begging them to wait till they got aboard, and he would start at the beginning.

"Yes," said Jean Marat, "thee other boys also want to hear."

When Wayne had been boosted to the deck, he was

again seized on, by numerous eager hands, and greeted with more excited questionings. Rufe already had things heating in the galley. Wayne stepped in to the darky and took him by his two arms.

"Rufe," he said, "I've got good news for you." The whites of Rufe's eyes showed in the lantern-light. "Julian's alive."

A cheer went up from the boys. And Rufe, pulling Wayne down with him, squatted on the deck.

"Say dat 'ar agin," he begged Wayne.

"Julian is alive and well."

"You see 'im?" said Rufe, eager for utmost verification.

"I was with him and talked with him last night," said Wayne.

Rufe jumped to his feet, rushed out of the galley, took a few strides forward and back on the deck; then he began to hum a lively tune, and patting his thighs to the time, he danced—"Slappity bang—swish—swish—swish, slappity bang slappity bang—swish—swish—swish, slappity bang" went his feet. And directly, all the boys were clapping time. Till finally Rufe ended with a final bang of his foot and a high-toned "Wow!"

"Ah jes' knowed dat li'le Julian was 'live!—Ah jes' knowed it!" He was the happiest soul on board, and that's not discounting the feelings of the others.

Then, as Wayne refreshed himself with the substantial things the others were pushing to him on the table, he

told the whole story of the adventures of himself and Robert since leaving the *Mercier*.

"Well, it's plain enough," declared Ray, "that Goya had a hunch you fellows would try to signal some ship or other."

"It's a wonder," said Phil, "he didn't chain up Julian Lamartine."

"He knew very well Julian wouldn't leave Loyo," returned Wayne.

"It's a wonder they don't hunt for the treasure in that cave," observed Joe.

"They probably have hunted all through it," said Wayne. "Pedro would hardly hide it there, for Julian says all the others knew about the cave. Some of them must have discovered the blazes on the trees where Slicky saw them digging, and now they think it might have been buried around about there."

Jean Marat had been down in the hold of the *Mercier*, and satisfied himself that the schooner was none the worse for her bump. He had also sounded the reef, and found that the *Mercier* was lying on the smooth sand, more than half her length hanging over within the lagoon. The tide was on the flow, and he calculated that the height would not be reached for three or four hours.

"I theenk," he said, "w'en the tide ees high, we can ged her inside. So now we mus' make ready."

The boys jumped at his call. A hawser was made fast

to the anchor, which was taken in one of the boats to a position a hundred feet inshore and cast overboard. Then it was but to wait till the tide had eased the schooner enough to allow of wearing her the balance of the way over the reef.

It was then Wayne became thoughtful of the general situation, and came forward with the proposal to attempt the rescue of Robert, Julian, and Loyo at once.

“When Goya finds out the *Mercier* is here,” he said, “he’ll be sure to set a stronger watch.”

“Yes,” said Captain Marat, “thad is true. We have to do queeck w’at we do. Two can stay weeth Rufe, an’ try ged thee schooner over w’en the tide ees sufficien’ high.”

Wayne told in detail the situation in the cave. And then it was arranged that all were to crawl into the cave by the small inlet on the hillside; and Jean Marat, if need be, would hold the sentinel at the point of his rifle, while Wayne, with tools, would free Robert of the chain, and the others bear out the helpless Loyo.

No time was lost, and soon all but Bert, Joe and Rufe were in one of the boats, moving to shore. The boat was pulled high on the beach, and the cavalcade set off southward, led by Wayne.

It was past midnight, and moonlight, when they neared the place; and Wayne crept forward in the brush alone, to reconnoiter. He had got to the very bush that hid that

hole in the hillside, when suddenly a voice sounded close by, and another struck up in reply. He turned and scurried back to his comrades.

"Something's up," he said. "They've set two guards at the hole. I guess they've already discovered Slicky in my place."

So there was nothing to do but give up the attempt for the time, and return to the *Mercier*. They arrived on board, all a little dashed in spirit over this check to their hopes. But Rufe cheered them up a bit.

"Aw, dey's gwine be some more chaine," he said. "You-all who kin work de telegraph widout no telegraph poles, ain't gwine ter be beat by no sech white trash as dem 'ar Dagoes, I knows."

CHAPTER XIX

A RECRUIT

IT was two o'clock; the moon lighted the deck; and four pairs of hands at the windlass set a strain on the hawser attached to the *Mercier's* anchor. Ray sang out: "Ho! — Heave! — Ho!" At each tug the schooner gave a little; and even before the tide had attained its full, the *Mercier* floated within the lagoon.

When the anchor had been made fast to its cable again, all but Joe, who took the watch, lay down for a few hours' rest. Wayne found it impossible to compose his mind, for he felt it devolved on him to concoct some plan for the rescue of those in the cave; since he only was familiar with the lay of the land. Finally, he gave up all hope of sleep, and he induced Joe to turn in and allow him to keep the watch.

Wayne paced the forward deck impatiently, for the harder he tried to think, the more confused his mind became. His thoughts persisted in flying off to the distressing details of the present situation of all those of the island, balking all his efforts to drive them forward to consideration of future effort to better the condition of his friends. The fact was that he was tired in mind and body. At last his thoughts took a turn towards home,

and there arose pictures of some of the doings of himself and his comrades in the old familiar region of the upper Mississippi; and he smiled over certain of the ludicrous things Ray had said and done. And so he forgot his immediate surroundings for a little spell; even forgot that he stood on the deck of the *Mercier*; and his eyes looked into space; his impatient pacing came to an end. Thus for a time his mind found rest in different — peaceful — activity.

When he awoke to his surroundings again, he felt refreshed, and almost unbidden, a plan took form in his mind, and the details unfolded quietly and clearly, and without any of the pain of effort.

Day came, and the sun was sending hot rays to the *Mercier's* decks, when the pallets were abandoned. The westerly breeze was little felt on the schooner, lying as she did in the lee of the hills of the island.

At breakfast, Wayne began to unfold his project to his comrades, one that got the boys' enthusiasm.

"Say, Captain," spoke Ray, "he makes my head feel as full of things as a bass drum. Believe me, he'd find a way to dance all round a sleeping weasel."

Jean Marat was suggesting certain details of preparation for getting Wayne's project into action, when Rufe called out: "Dey's a comin', boys! Dar dey is! — in dem pa'ms yondah."

All hurried to the rail, and binoculars were got out and leveled toward the shore.

"Looks like pretty near an army of them," said Phil.

"And half of them have got guns," added Bert, "and they're coming right this way."

"I'd like to know who invited them," said Ray. "I hope they aren't going to swim out here — I'd hate awfully to spoil a frying-pan on one of their heads."

The crew on shore came to a stand under a group of palms at the edge of the wood. Wayne easily made out Lafitte Goya, gesticulating in talk with one of the men.

"There's one of them coming down to the beach with a white flag," said Ray. "Going to wig-wag us, I guess."

"That's Norris, the Englishman," said Wayne.

The Englishman reached the edge of the lagoon.

"Boat, ahoy!" he called.

"All righ'," called back Captain Marat. "W'at you want?"

The man put his hands to his mouth and shouted his message.

"Captain Goya says — he will give you the prisoners, if you will give him directions for the treasure."

Wayne, Ray, and Marat conferred as to what sort of answer they should make.

"If," said Wayne, "we tell them we have no directions, except what they've already got in the letters they took from us, or give them any other definite answer, they might decide to do something very unpleasant."

"Jus' so," agreed Marat, "thad w'at I theenk. You,

Ray, you tell heem we theenk aboud eet, an' led heem know."

"Invite Norris to join us," added Wayne.

"Ahoy!" called Ray to Norris, on the beach. "Tell Goya that we'll think about it, and let him know later." Then—"Norris!" he added. "We want you to join us!"

A moment's hesitation, and the Englishman nodded, and otherwise gave as friendly a response in pantomime, as he dared, under the eyes behind him; and he turned and strode back to the others among the trees.

"He'll come," declared Wayne. "He'll just wait for a good chance."

"Yes," said Ray. "He might hurt the feelings of those deah chaps, if he was to ditch them right now."

"Yaw, I guess," observed Phil, "they might hurt *his* feelings some, if they was to turn loose on him with their guns."

It could be seen that Lafitte Goya heard Norris's report; and then, with one look toward the *Mercier*, he motioned all forward, and the Spaniards set off southward again.

"And now," observed Ray, "Wayne'll be saying—while they suppose we're 'thinking about it,' it's time to get busy."

Under Captain Marat's direction, Joe, Phil, and Charlie set to work on a sailing-rig for one of the boats; Ray, Leslie, and Bert he put to work on a hat-full of shot-gun

shells, punching out the caps, and loading them with powder. Marat, himself, got busy with rope-strands, oil, and the like, improvising fuses, as if for mining operations. Wayne stretched himself in the shade of the house, for the sleep he so much needed.

With all the activity on board, the day slipped by quickly; and dusk was just beginning to fall, when the boys were startled by the cracking of gun-shots, a mile down the shore. Marat dove into the cabin for his rifle, and in a few minutes, the *Mercier's* crew made out a form, running and dodging among the shore palms. Then they saw a man burst from cover opposite the schooner, making toward the water. Now some shots rang out from the woods, and as the figure swam toward the schooner, more bullets pattered the water of the lagoon.

Then Marat set his rifle to his shoulder, and two shots, for some reason or other, silenced the shore battery.

Wayne and Ray climbed over the rail into one of the boats, and, as that head came close, they reached over to help the man in.

"Are you hurt, Norris?" said Wayne. The man rolled in over the edge.

"Not a scratch," returned the puffing Norris. "Goya's the only crack shot in the bunch, and I got his rifle. It's in the lagoon."

"You are ver' welcome, Meestaire Norris," said Jean Marat, when the dripping Englishman set his foot on deck.

"Thank you, Captain," returned Norris. "I'm mighty glad to get quit of that crew. I was a fool ever to believe that Goya cuss."

"How did you make your get-away?" said Ray.

"Well, you see," returned Norris, "Goya kept a sharp eye on me all day. I guess he smelt a rat when you called out your invite. And this evening he ordered me ahead of him, and we marched up to the mouth of the cave. And there he stopped to talk with the two Dagoes he had there for guards. I squatted on the ground, and I'd just been saying to myself — 'Here now, Grant Norris, that pirate's got something cooking for you — now or never.' I quietly slashed the strings to my shoes, and slipped them off without his noticing. And — he stood with the butt of his fancy rifle on the ground, and his hand on the muzzle — I took a deep breath, reached over and hooked on to the gun, and cut for it.

"I paddled round the hill, and they after me, yelling. I dodged among the trees, they peppering away now and then. I guess Goya had grabbed one of the guards' rifles. But, though he's a crack with his own gun, he isn't used to those Mausers the men have. I dropped his rifle in the water close to the shore — it's just opposite that bunch of palms, and I'm going after it."

And with that he rose from his chair.

The boys advised against the risk; but he laughed.

"Oh, I've been under fire before," he said, "and I

guess they won't waste any more ammunition. Besides, salt water's not good for fine iron like that."

He insisted on going alone in the boat. Marat held his rifle ready in case of a shot from shore. But the hunters had evidently gone, for there was nothing heard of them.

It had grown quite dark when Norris came back; and he exhibited a handsome arm, taking the same ammunition as Marat's rifle.

"Say," said Norris, gloating over the rifle, "that Dago's burning the air with the things he's promising to do to me when he gets the windward of me again."

Grant Norris proved a hearty fellow, and it was wonderful with what ease he made himself at home amongst the *Mercier's* crew. Wayne's plan for attempting the rescue of those in the cave was recounted to him, and he gave it strong approval.

"And now, Captain," he said, saluting, "consider me, if you will, signed on your ship — under your orders. But if you'll allow the suggestion, send me in the boat on that trip around. I pull a strong oar — if the wind fails, and I don't know the inside of the cave; and there will likely be more to do down there when the thing goes off."

And he had his way. And when, at ten o'clock, the sail was put into the boat, with a pair of gunny-sacks, holding quilts (Norris's suggestion), and the fuse and shot shells, he pushed off in the company of Ray and Leslie.

CHAPTER XX

BATTLES, SHAM AND REAL

NORRIS and Ray took the oars, and sent the boat skimming northward over the dark lagoon, till they turned the point and set her nose into the teeth of the westerly breeze. Now came two miles of a hard pull, and they rounded the northeast corner of the island and pointed southwest, down the windward shore. Here they set up their sail, and directly were moving down within the line of coral reefs under a steady breeze. Norris held the steering-oar.

“This beats rowing. Eh, boys?” said he.

“You bet,” agreed Ray. “Rowing’s a lot of sport till you know there’s a sail in the boat. Then it’s punky-punk-punk. Every stroke I took with that sail rubbing against me hurt like a toothache — a new tooth joining the procession each time.”

“Well, this is the cure,” laughed Norris.

“Yes — for toothache,” said Ray. “But what kind of a picnic is this going to turn out that Wayne’s sent us on?”

“Oh, I’m thinking it’ll be some sport — But I’d give something to see those Dago friends of mine humping

around to see what the celebration is. I almost wish I was going to be still amongst 'em when this thing goes off."

"I suppose we'll have them sniping at us with their Mausers," suggested Leslie.

"Maybe," said Norris. "But I'm thinking it'll be at the most of 500 hundred yards by that time. I've got my sights set for that anyway. I'd just like to plunk Goya one with his own rifle — mine now. He's been pretty nasty to me lately — kind of suspicious since your two friends came. And I reckon he's had good reason; I've wanted to cut that company ever since I came to this island and saw just how things stood."

"That Goya must be a smooth kind of fellow," observed Ray.

"Yes, he is," returned Norris. "He can play the goody-goody when he wants to. But I can't get over the way he fooled me, and that any one would size me up for the kind of chap he took me for."

"He picked you for an easy mark," said Ray.

"Yes," said Norris. "He figured that once he got me with him I'd stand for anything he did."

"Looks like the moon's shining on the top of those hills," said Leslie.

"Yes, the moon's up," said Norris. "And here, I guess is where we make a landing and wait for the time to begin our part of the programme."

Norris set the bow of the boat into the mouth of a

small stream; down came the sail, and soon the three were dragging the boat up on shore, close to the spot where Robert had put the wireless in hiding just six nights ago.

"Well," said Norris, as he squatted on the ground, "what does your watch say now?"

"Give me a light, Leslie," said Ray. A flash, and he reported the time twenty-five after twelve.

"We've an hour and a half," said Norris. "Well, nothing like being ahead with your appointments."

"How close are we?" asked Leslie.

"We're within half a mile of the schooner — around the point. But it isn't so far across to the houses."

For a spell, the three adventurers sat in their sheltered nook, Norris, for entertainment, giving Ray and Leslie short accounts of some of his adventures in the Spanish-American countries. And it quickly became evident to the boys that their new comrade was at heart, as in his experiences, a soldier of fortune; and action and danger were the things that kept him going.

When Ray's watch told that one o'clock had passed, Norris got on his feet.

"Now, boys," he said, "I'll just slip over and see how the land lies. I'll be back in fifteen minutes."

"Well, don't pick a scrap with your friends," cautioned Ray. "Remember you've got two little jay-birds under your wing."

"Never fear," laughed Norris. "And I'll leave Goya's pop-gun with you for company."

And he was off through the brush.

"I'm glad we've got that fellow with us," said Leslie.

"He almost makes me feel brave."

"Well, and I wouldn't like to have him against us," returned Ray.

"From what he said, he'd never have been with those others if he'd known what they are," said Leslie.

"He must have had a tough time while he was with them finding out," said Ray; "though he don't squeal much about it."

Soon the boys heard Norris breaking through the bushes on his return.

"Well," said he, "it's as dead as a mummy over there. And we may as well move down to the point."

So the boat was pushed off, and in fifteen minutes more the point was made.

"We'd better get right over in the shadow of the schooner," said Norris. "It can't be more than fifteen minutes more to wait."

The point was turned, and the schooner *Miguel* opened to view, riding quietly at her anchor, in the moonlight, 200 yards away. It required but a few minutes to gain her port side and make the boat's painter fast to the shrouds.

"Now," began Norris, "this setting the fireworks is your stunt, and I'll slip over to the starboard and keep an eye out."

He crawled aboard the *Miguel* and got himself to his

station. Then Ray went over the rail, and Leslie handed up the bag of shot shells, and a bomb Jean Marat had improvised of a brass lamp-bowl. Leslie followed. Working in the increasing moonlight, Ray laid out the shot shells — two dozen — already strung on the fuse, and the bomb; and with small nails and a hammer, with the least noise, he tacked them to the deck. The shells were set on the fuse in irregular groups, the bomb led the procession.

Finally, Ray got out his watch. Some minutes passed. Then, in a whisper, "All's ready," said he. "If you fellows will get in and hold the boat by, I'll touch her off."

Leslie and Norris scrambled down, unloosed the painter; and, each at a pair of oars, they set the stern against the *Miguel*, and waited for Ray.

Ray struck his match and put it to the tail of fuse; and waiting only to see that it was well alight, he hurried over the side to the boat's stern thwart. And in went the four oars, and the boat sped toward the smaller isle to the south.

"Captain Marat," spoke Ray, "said he thought the fuse would take ten or fifteen minutes, but wasn't sure."

"Well, we'll play it'll only take two," said Norris, putting muscle into his strokes. "When we get over close to the little island, we'll have the wind a little, and we can stick up the sail."

Though the moon was in its last quarter, it lay a sheen

over the sound, the white beach, the hills, and tree tops. The graceful palms seemed sentient beings, drowsily moving their fans under the night breeze. There was no other moving thing on the land. The houses seemed deserted, and the schooner a thing abandoned — a queer, unearthly sputtering of sparks travelling slowly along its deck.

The boat continued its hurried course across the sound, its occupants tense with suspense. Ray was on the point of giving voice to his fear lest the fuse had gone out, when — “BOOM!” The boat shook. The blast woke the island — Birds flew aloft, screaming. Then, in a few moments — “Bang! Bang! — Bang! Bang! Bang! — Bang! — Bang! Bang! — Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!” Then came a two minute interval, and again — “Bang! Bang! Bang! — Bang! — Bang! Bang! Bang! — Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!”

The rowers sat rigid — spell-bound.

“Glorious!” said Norris, when the end came. “That’ll fetch them — every one of the bunch.”

Then they were able to make out figures in the moonlight, scurrying among the palms on the shore.

“Let’s put ginger into the oars,” said Norris, setting the example.

Ray took the oars from Leslie now, and they pointed the bow to the east.

The moon sent down slanting beams through the palms on the excited, outcrying mob, taking increment, from

moment to moment, of figures hurrying down from the hills. A startled word from one, at the last, directed all eyes across the sound. Then, with renewed shouting, they went scampering back toward the bunk-house.

Soon Norris declared for the sail. "Not much wind in here," he said, "but it'll beat rowing anyway."

The sail had been pulling but a few minutes, when a rifle-shot rang out over the sound.

"Well, they've sighted us," said Norris.

He threw one of the quilt-stuffed bags to the stern, the other to the middle of the boat. "Get behind them," he told the boys. "Now, Ray, you hold the steering oar, and keep your head down — I'll direct you. And, Leslie, you hang on to the sheet."

Several shots rang out from the shore. Then Norris took up the rifle in the bow. He didn't see fit as yet to reply, but watched the shore sharply. In a little, they were opposite the long house.

"Just what I suspected," said Norris. "They're putting out a boat." And his manner of speech betrayed his relish in the prospect.

"Keep down, boys. And ease a little on your helm, Ray. Trim your sheet a little, Leslie."

The Spaniards' boat was now coming rapidly forward, and very soon a couple of shots burst over the water. Now Norris took aim and fired.

"See how you like your own lead," said he, and cracked two more balls at the enemy.

“ Ah, they’ve quit rowing,” said Norris. “ Don’t feel quite so sure of their game, I guess.”

Two more shots came from the Spaniards. And Norris sent back three.

Then — “ They’ve turned tail!” broke out Norris. “ And they’re getting back a little faster than they came.” He sent them a parting ball. “ That pill’s for a tonic,” he added.

The ardent boys were already up from their cover; and in ten minutes, during which the enemy had made shore and taken to cover, the boat made through the breakers on the reef, and turned up the east side of the island, heading toward the *Mercier*.

“ Golly!” said Ray. “ I hope the other fellows have the same luck.”

CHAPTER XXI

THE RESCUE

WHEN, that night in the dimness of the cave, Robert saw the last of Wayne, going round the turn of the passage, it was more of comfort than regret he felt; his comrade was to get a taste of fresh air, and a chance to stretch his limbs. And then, with his unbounded faith in Wayne's capabilities, he had a hope he would succeed in getting the wireless to working again; and so make more certain the leading the *Mercier* to the islands.

He waited till he was sure Wayne was safely out of the cave; and then he turned with some curiosity to the indistinctly shown figures opposite, all undisturbed in their sleep. And here he found fresh leaven for satisfaction: Julian and Loyo, after all living — the enterprise was yet destined to succeed. For he hadn't the least doubt — such is the way of youth — that Julian would be rescued, and his treasure finally recovered. And there was Wayne to find ways; for hadn't he memories of former occasions, when Wayne had shown his superiority to great embarrassments?

Finally, giving in to fatigue, he crawled into the blankets, out of the underground chill, and was soon asleep.

When Robert awoke, and looked about him in the obscurity of the cavern, his eyes met those of a lad, seated on the pallet opposite, as if waiting for him. He knew him for Julian, of course. And Julian addressed Robert as Wayne, and informed him that breakfast had been brought, a little while ago.

"But," said Julian, "I didn't want to wake you, because I know how poor a sleeper you are, and now you seemed to be sleeping so soundly."

Robert then got himself a little more in the lantern-light, but put his finger on his mouth to check the startled word that was on Julian's lips. And so, without a word spoken, and Julian continuing to regard his exchanged companion with curious eyes, they ate of the breakfast. Loyo took what Julian gave him, sitting propped up a bit, but otherwise showed no interest in what was going on about him.

Julian, realizing that Robert wished to conceal from the Spaniards the fact of the substitution, and readily perceiving that Robert's voice if heard by the Spaniards was likely to betray him, did not press conversation, though he would have liked an explanation.

When, after a time, a step was heard in the passage, Robert fell back as far as possible into the obscurity of his nook. Gomez appeared, and after pushing on to a shelf in the box such food as remained, he took up the basket and went away again.

Then, reasonably secure that Gomez would be out of

earshot for some time, Robert moved closer to Julian, who in turn edged up; and in guarded words, there came some explanation. And Robert managed to convey hope of an early bettering of the situation.

“It is awfully good of you all,” said Julian.

“Nothing like that,” returned Robert. “Life wasn’t half so much fun till we got to doing a little to help other folks. Wayne told me about Loyo; I hope he gets well soon.”

“It’s his head, poor Loyo,” said Julian. “Gomez hit him and made a break in his skull. And now he don’t seem to remember things.”

And so the day passed, the time marked for the prisoners only by the arrival of the food-hamper, which was brought by Gomez — chief jailer. And it was not till the second morning that the substitution was discovered. Gomez saw fit to examine the fetter on Robert’s ankle, and noted the half open condition of the end link. He seized up the lantern and brought it to Robert’s face. He was much taken aback at his discoveries; and he called the sentinel, and with excited words sent him off scampering. Soon Lafitte Goya appeared on the scene. Goya jerked Robert round to view.

“Where the other one?” he demanded.

For answer, Robert waved his hand — by intent down the passage.

Goya called the sentinel and gave him a berating, in words that Robert could not understand. Goya then put

hammer to the partly open link; and a half hour later, one of the men appeared with a second and heavier chain, which was wrought securely to Robert's other ankle.

Lafitte Goya was properly upset, and he raged. To be so bested by a pair of mere boys! He glared into Robert's face, and made threats in the Spanish.

When the Spaniards were at last all gone, and it became quiet in the cave again, Julian expressed great sorrow over this fresh setback for Robert.

"Oh, pshaw!" said Robert. "They had to find out some time; and they can't get Wayne now; and when the — something — comes, he'll figure out some way. I'm not fearing."

Robert's assurance greatly cheered Julian. And then, later in the day, it became evident to the two that something unusual was toward. For it showed in the demeanor of Gomez, who once came in, and the excited talk between two of the men, who now stood guard. Julian strained his ears for an intelligent word.

"I tell you what," said Robert. "I'll bet what I expected has come!"

"I could not understand all they said," offered Julian, "but they talked about a schooner coming in over the reef, and about some one they called to, who said — 'will think about it.' One said — 'Yes, they sure know how to find it; and we must keep the prisoners safe till they tell.'"

"That's it!" declared Robert. "I'll bet it's our fellows. It can't be any one else."

This fresh hope greatly buoyed the two. And Robert held vigil, on edge with expectation, long after Julian had fallen into sleep. Finally Robert, too, dropped off.

If in his sleep he had been endowed with a clairvoyance, claimed by some, he might have seen Ray and Leslie, with their new comrade, Norris, making around the island toward the *Miguel*, lying tranquilly at anchor in the sound. And he might have seen a procession moving down the eastern shore of the island; first Wayne, then Jean Marat, Joe, Phil, Charlie, Bert; Marat carrying his rifle; Joe and Phil, each a staff. He might have seen them all crouching, waiting in the brush, a little way from the small hole of the cave, and Wayne crawling forward, near to where the two sentinels sat in talk.

But Robert would not have seen more, nor heard the boom, and the rattle of shots, as of a battle, coming from near a mile to the south; which sounds so startled the guards at either exit of the cave, and sent them scurrying thitherward. For both he and Julian were suddenly awakened by voices of Spaniards calling, down the passage, and quickly gone. And then, after a short interval, there burst in upon them from the other way their friends from the *Mercier*.

"Hello! Robert — Julian," said Wayne. "We're after you."

Marat hurried down the passage a way, his rifle at ready. Joe, Phil, and Charlie seized up a blanket, and with the two staffs made a litter, on to which they lifted

Loyo, and hurried away, followed by Julian. Wayne produced a file and began on Robert's shackles.

Joe and Phil, with the help of Charlie and Julian, got Loyo out by the hole, where Bert stood watch. And so, change about, they bore the big darkey to the north with all the speed of which they were capable.

But the others, in the cave, fared not so well. Wayne was making slow headway with the file; and Marat suddenly appeared from down the passage.

"They come!" he said. "They are almos' here."

"Give me the file, Wayne," said Robert, "and git!"

"All right," said Wayne. "I'll come back in a little if I can. When they see Julian gone, they may all take after them."

And so Wayne and Jean Marat hurried up the passage, and Wayne spoke as they went.

"Captain Marat," he said. "I'm going to slip in a side passage, and when they've gone by and out, I'll go back and help Slicky. If you'll hide outside — just north of the hole, I'll throw a rock or something toward you when Slicky and I get to the opening. Then if you'll fool the guards away from the hole, in case they get back there, we can slip out."

"Ver' good," returned Marat.

And he hurried out, as Wayne, flashing his lamp, found his way into the unused passage leading north.

Robert shoved the file under his blankets, and in a pair of moments a half dozen of the Spaniards, armed

with rifles, hurried in. They took a look round, missed Julian and Loyo, and set up an excited jabbering in the Spanish. Then came a hasty examination of Robert's fetters; and one hastened back down the passage — doubtless to inform Goya — while the five rushed up the way Wayne and the others had gone.

Wayne heard them go by him. Another moment, and he turned back toward Robert, whom he found already filing away at a chain, which soon parted. Wayne then took the file, and in another minute the other chain fell away.

Arrived at the opening, Wayne picked up a missile bit, and reaching out, pitched it to the north. Then the boys heard a thrown object go crashing through the brush, down the hill, sent by Jean Marat. Two forms of guards jumped up, just below, and darted off; either to investigate, or through fear of an attack.

The boys then scrambled out, and joined Marat, and the three ran northward.

"This way," said Wayne. And he led them over the ridge, between the hill-tops, and down the west side.

They hastened on without a word, for a mile. Then came a stop for rest.

"Ah, eet went ver' fine!" said Jean Marat. "You fool them ver' complete."

"And those shells went off great," said Wayne. "Sounded like a regular battle. I told them," added he, by way of explanation to Robert, "that if we got sepa-

rated, they were to take Julian and Loyo on board, and then wait for signals from the oak."

"The hollow, sure!" said Robert. "Those fellows could never find us in there."

The three took up the march again to the north, soon went back over the ridge, and passed round the northeast spur of hills, and arrived at the hollow tree. One after the other, they crawled under the Spanish bayonet plant, Robert, Marat, and Wayne; and ascended, within, by the rope ladder.

"Thad is ver' *ingeni*," pronounced Marat, admiring the retreat, as he settled himself on a limb.

Through the branches the three could see the *Mercier*, lying at anchor in the lagoon. A light shone on board. Wayne opened the suit-case, which was found still hanging within the oak, and got out a pair of binoculars. These he leveled on the schooner.

"There's more than Rufe there," he said. "They got on board all right."

"I wonder," queried Marat, "eef the other ones have come back?"

"Ray, Leslie, and Norris," said Wayne, still using the glasses. "I can't make out if they're there."

"Norris?" questioned Robert.

"Yes, Slicky," said Wayne, "Norris is with us."

And so Robert, who had not as yet got the story of the night's enterprise, now listened to Wayne's account of what had taken place since they two parted.

The narrative was not without interruption. For soon, voices broke from down in the woods, to the south, and several figures of Spaniards came into a patch of moonlight, moving directly toward the oak. Our three scrambled into the hole, like squirrels, Wayne's head out and peeking through the screen of Spanish moss. Then the men, all armed, as Wayne could see, passed the tree and went round the northeast spur of the ridge.

"They've gone round the hill," said Wayne, speaking down to his companions in the hollow. "I guess they've found out you're gone, Slicky, and are after us."

"They'll have a sweet time finding us," said Robert.

"Ah, they never can suspec' thees place," observed Marat.

"Here they come back," reported Wayne. And he watched the men as they came straggling by in the moonlit space, and disappear into the shadows of the forest to the south. "Well, they've gone," he added then.

"I guess they theenk we have gone on board the *Mercier*," observed Marat; and he followed Robert out into the branches of the great oak again.

Wayne resumed his explanations to Robert, as he endeavored, by frequent flashes of his electric lamp, to attract those on the *Mercier*. After a time there came from the schooner an answering signal.

"They've seen us!" said Wayne.

And then, in the code, he flashed the following:

Enemy gone south. Take boat around N E point, but hold off till you see our light on shore. W.

"O K," came back the answer from the *Mercier*.

Very soon the three in the branches saw a boat put off from the schooner and make northward.

"Too bad it ees moonlight," said Marat.

"Yes," added Robert. "I hope those Spaniards don't see them."

But the Spaniards evidently had seen them, for again six armed men appeared, slipping along by, in the shelter of the shore palms, below, as if they meant to intercept the boat when it should touch shore.

"They saw the *Mercier* signalling," said Wayne. "I didn't wait long enough."

"What'll we do now?" said Robert.

"We'll have to swim for it, as Norris did," said Wayne.

"And what about the boat?" said Robert. "We can't warn them, for those men'll see our light."

"The boat will hold off till they see our light on shore," said Wayne.

"Ver' good foresight!" observed Marat. "Ver' excellen'!"

The three were directly at the bottom of the oak's hollow, stripping off their clothing.

"But I can not leave my rifle!" said Marat, suddenly come to a stop. "Ah!" he quickly added, "I see how I weel do."

He buckled his cartridge belt about his bare waist; and, as the three crawled out beneath the bayonet-plant, leaving their clothing behind, he held in his grasp the rifle and his shirt. When they had darted across an open space into the shelter of the trees, Marat cast about till he found a dry branch of convenient size, and to this he bound the rifle, using the shirt's arms for rope.

They slipped into the quiet waters of the lagoon, only the three heads and the stick bearing the rifle, showing. All were good swimmers, and in a quarter hour they had made round the stern, and to the outer side of the *Mercier*, and crawling quietly into the small boat, in another pair of minutes they were on the deck of the schooner, and looking toward a chatting group, bunched at the bow, intent on the boat gone north.

"Call the boat back," spoke out Wayne.

"Well, say!" broke out Phil, as all turned to gape, as on an apparition.

"Call the boat back," repeated Wayne. "We swam for it. Goya's crowd came back when the boat started, and went up to the point to cut it off."

"It's a mighty good thing," said Joe, "that you signalled to hold off; they wondered why they couldn't go right in."

And he forthwith began to flash signals to the boat.

In the meantime, the others pounced on Robert, and slapped his bare back. And it was—"Hello! Slicky.

How do you like being in the chain-gang?" and "We began to think you'd quit us and joined that pirate," and "Well, we're bully glad to see you again."

"It seems like a good many years since I was on this deck," said Robert. "Give me something to wear, somebody."

The boat was soon back. Ray, Charlie, and Norris climbed aboard.

"Say, Wayne," began Ray, when the situation had been explained, "that was a mean trick — to fool us up there with the boat, and then come sneaking in the back door like that. But we'll forgive you; for you gave us a bunch of sport with that scheme of yours — Boom! bangety-bang! — beat any Fourth I ever had."

"The bes' of all," said Jean Marat, "eet work-ed perféc'!"

"That it did," echoed Norris.

Then, as day dawned, the happy Rufe sent up much black smoke out of the galley stack, sang, and made many festive sounds. There was much chatter: comparing notes, and dovetailing the various adventures of the various parties. And it might have been interesting, as Ray conjectured, to have had "pirate Lafitte Goya's story of his side of the doin's."

And Ray had to tell Wayne about Rufe and his joy when Julian came aboard.

"I never saw anybody so worked up," said Ray.

“ ‘ Dar’s my li’le Julian! — Dar’s my li’le Julian dat we-all be’n a-waitin’ fo’. Hallelujah! You ’members yo’ ole Rufe? ’ and he took him up on his knee, the tears running out his eyes; and he sang him an old darky song. Listen — he’s singing it now.”

CHAPTER XXII

HOW GRANT NORRIS JOINED THE PIRATE

IT was near noon when the July sun drove the first of the sleepers from his pallet. It was not long till the last of the boys arose to cool his sweat-dripping face in a basin of water. Rufe's noon breakfast had no sooner been disposed of than each began to cast fugitive glances on the others, as if he would say — "Well, what's next?" It was come time to take stock of the situation again. And there was yet some unexpressed curiosity bearing on Grant Norris's past relations with Lafitte Goya and his crew. Norris himself was the one to break the ice on this point.

"If you fellows don't mind," he said, "I'd like to explain my connection with that crew down there," nodding, as he spoke, in the direction of that hornets' nest.

He was encouraged to tell his story from the beginning. And directly, the boys were centering their eyes on the man with keen interest.

With the inclination to thinning of his foretop, and some silver bristles in his two weeks' growth of beard, he had the appearance of a man well up in the forties. But his nimbleness of action, and expression of face, and

his enthusiasms, were rather those of a youth. He was broad of shoulder, small of waist, and had the muscles of a smith.

Even as a boy — his story made it plain — he had been always venturesome; and like many a British lad, his great dream was to be a sailor and have adventures. A grandfather, an old salt, had secretly encouraged his ambition, which, as usual, was frowned on by his parents. Since his elder brother was to be prepared to enter his father's business, Grant Norris was to be educated for one of the professions — medicine was his father's final selection. So Grant was put through his preliminary education; and he even put up with near two years of medical study.

“But when it came round time for examinations,” said Norris, “I made up my mind that feeling people's wrists and looking at their tongues, would not do for me; so I took French leave, and got a berth on a ship going round the Horn. Now, if my father had shown good sense, he would have let me have a taste of the sea, and get my belly-full; and then I would have been more willing to settle down to something at home. For I did get my belly full in a year. But then I was, I guess, too proud to go home and say so. I wrote home to my mother, and sister (who was two years older than myself), but I didn't admit it even to them that I was satiated of the thing.

“Well, I finally got to knocking round in South Amer-

ica, and got mixed up, sometimes, in rather shady doings. But that was because I was deceived by others who pulled me in. My sister used to write me that I must always be on my guard against my companions, 'For,' she said, 'you know, Grant, you make friends too easily; and you're altogether too trusting, and ready to take up the cudgel for any one who hands you a plausible story of wrongs he wants some help to right.' You see, she recollected some of my scrapes in school. But she doesn't know how near she hit the nail on the head, and how little good her warnings did.

"I got mixed up once in the overthrowing of one of those republic governments, and the kidnapping of the President, and the looting of the treasury — or a part of it. A revolutionary general I fell in with hired me to write him some documents in English; and he finally gave me a great story of the wrongs against the people by the government that he was going to overthrow. He offered me a high office, and something like a statue, finally, in the park in the capital, as one of the liberators of the people.

"Well, it was his story, not the office or the statue — I can say — that got me; and hardly a handful of us carried it through. We caught the Illustrious President in his garden in the evening. And since a prominent official in the president's cabinet was in the plot, there was no difficulty in getting at and carrying off a considerable mass of portable funds of the treasury. We made a

twenty mile ride into the country, stopping at a collection of huts the General called his headquarters. The kidnapped President was shoved into one, and a guard set; and my General, myself (Lieutenant General), and the member of the President's cabinet, made ourselves at home in another of the buildings.

“Now, I had been told that we should find the revolutionary army here; and we did. It consisted of not over twenty armed men. And it didn't take me ten minutes, in that room, to learn that the whole game was between these two men, and they had had no other thought or purpose than to get their claws on the treasury gold, and to gain further money by way of a ransom for the person of the President. They were using the name ‘Revolution’ as a guise. Those two had no sooner sat themselves down, the money-bags under the table, than they began to discuss the division of the money and the ransom to be demanded for the President. And it was then I began to experience my punishment.

“Well, we were soon called into the next room to a feast. And while the two — forgetting their food — were trying to figure out how big they dared make the amount of the ransom, I made excuse to go and look after the guard (for that was my job as Lieutenant General); and, passing through the other room, I grabbed up the money-bags and wrapped them in my coat; went to the prison shack; sent the guard on an errand; pulled out the Illustrious President; put him on a horse with half the

loot; I mounted another; and we slipped out of camp on the road back to the capital — I wondering at what moment those two back there would have decided on the amount of that ransom.

“The Illustrious President got loquacious when he found out what we were up to; was going to do all sorts of things for me, for saving his precious government’s precious chunk of treasury, and so on. I told him to save his breath to cool his tamales, and keep his horse going. When we got to his palace gates, I handed him the stuff I had, and told him to hike for the house, and to avoid the unwholesome air of the garden after dark. And then he wanted me at least to accept a paltry five thousand. I told him I’d seen enough of his government’s money. And he wanted my name, for connection with public expressions of gratitude.

“‘Not on your life,’ I told him. And I gave my horse the spur, and made for the harbor; turned my horse loose, and paid a fisherman to row me out to an American gunboat. With the explanation that I was wanting to keep out of the way of the revolutionary crowd, the officer on duty gave me a bed. In the morning, I was taken to the captain, who began to cross-question me as to my movements. But I gave him no enlightenment beyond that I was afraid of the revolutionaries.

“He smiled rather much while he was quizzing me; and finally handed me a new sheet. Beginning in big black head-lines, there was a very glowing account of the

affair of the kidnapping, especially of the rescue of the President by a very brave and mysterious American, who had proudly rejected all reward, and had been indifferent to all expressions of gratitude, and who had disappeared. And more of the usual rot — they're a demonstrative lot.

“ The gun-boat captain grinned, when I looked up from the reading, and said he thought he could point his finger at that American. When I told him the subject didn't interest me, that I was a Britisher afraid of the revolutionaries, he wanted to know what he could do for me. I told him that I wanted to be set ashore at the next port he touched.

“ And so, finally, I found myself up in Central America. And there's where I ran across this Lafitte Goya, with the dog, Gomez, at his heels. I'd begun to forget the South American lesson, I guess; and Goya had a new kind of story about a fellow who, for a good many years had been stealing pearls at some islands belonging to the Central American country, and how he (Lafitte Goya) held a secret commission from the government to confiscate the treasure of pearls, and moneys from sales, of which he was to receive half for his service. He drew a very strong picture of the villainous character of the pearler, and how he had a giant black man, whose particular business it was to maltreat the men who were so unfortunate as to fall into the clutches of the pearl thief and become his slaves. Gomez he pulled forward as evi-

dence, he having been one of those slaves — escaped; and Gomez had horrible tales to tell.

“ Well, I joined him. And after a time, he picked up three villainous Dagoes. And we sailed to the island in a whale-boat. There were half a dozen Dagoes and two Japs there, besides the big black fellow and young Julian. Lafitte Goya began to get busy with the men — got them on his side. But the two Japs didn’t line up with him; and finally they disappeared from sight. I had no guess how, till I saw two fresh graves under the palms. I told Goya then, that I wouldn’t stand for any such doings. He protested that he had nothing to do with it, and it was some fight in the night.

“ You can guess, I began to smell how things were; and I got it from the black fellow, Loyo, who was sick, that old Pedro had got from the government owning the island a franchise to fish for pearls there; and I wormed it out of one of the men that no sort of cruelties had been practiced on them. Altogether it didn’t take me long to find out that I had allowed myself to be taken in again, as in South America. I finally decided to lay low, and watch my chance to get out of the scrape. And when we met up with you fellows, I began to hope the chance might come. But Goya and Gomez had got suspicious of me, and they kept a sharp eye on me, and managed to keep me away from you chaps, till I finally made the break.”

"You sure had a lonesome time," said Ray, "with all that crew around you."

"What do you think Goya will do now?" said Wayne.

"I think he'll keep on trying to locate the treasure," said Norris. "He thinks you know how to go about to find it, and that he'll somehow get the information out of you."

And again the question as to what was next to be done forced itself forward. And Julian Lamartine spoke up.

"I don't want you folks, who have shown so much kindness," he said, "to run more risks on my account. I shall be perfectly willing to give up the treasure and go away."

"Id mus' be like you boys make thee decision," said Captain Marat. "Thees is your enterprise. W'at you say, so id shall be."

And then, for formality's sake, Wayne addressed his comrades, stating the present situation, which was already plain to all. And he had them vote on the question. They all voted the one way. None were disposed to sail away from the islands without an earnest effort to recover Julian's treasure for him.

"And now, that's settled, here are some things I have been thinking about," said Wayne. "The letter of old Pedro Lamartine to Loyo indicates that Loyo had some knowledge of how to find the treasure. So if Loyo should get well of his injury, we stand a good chance of

finding it; if he doesn't, our chance is perhaps as poor as those fellows now looking for it."

"Now listen to him, fellows," broke in Ray. "He isn't through; he's got something up his sleeve that he's been keeping to himself — to spring on us. See if I'm not right."

"You remember," went on Wayne, who had long ago got used to Ray's quirks, "when Doctor Stewart used to give us our First Aid Work; and how he sometimes took us with him to the hospital? and once showed us a man who had had his head hurt; and he couldn't understand words spoken to him, or that he saw written?"

The boys remembered.

"And you remember, Doctor Stewart said it was called word deafness and word blindness," said Wayne.

"It was a case of aphasia," interposed Grant Norris. "I saw such cases in the hospitals at home."

"Yes, aphasia — that's a word Doctor Stewart used, too," said Leslie.

"And you remember," continued Wayne, "they operated on the man — lifted out the skull bone that pressed on that certain part of his brain — and he got well; and understood words as good as ever?"

"Yes," said the boys.

"Well," said Wayne, "I guess you know what I'm driving at. That's just what's the trouble with Loyo."

"That case you just told about," said Julian, "seems just like Loyo."

"Well, then," went on Wayne, "you see what we've got to try to do. And Mr. Norris, here, is just the one who's had some experience."

"Well, I'll tell you, boys," said Norris. "I didn't get much experience in surgery — especially of the head. But I've seen some of that kind. And I've just got a notion maybe we can do it — between us. We can try, anyway. Let's take a look at the injury."

They went to where the big black fellow lay — a listless look in his eyes — on a pallet in the shade of an awning, close to the house.

"I think his rheumatism is all gone," said Julian. "If his head should get well, he'd be all right again."

Loyo looked up to Julian, hardly seeming to notice the others. And he allowed him to take off the bandage from his head.

"Yes," said Norris. "You see it's back and above his ear. I can feel the break."

The attempt to relieve Loyo was set for the next morning; and the remainder of the day was utilized by Norris and Wayne in preparation.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE OPERATION ON LOYO — THE ENIGMA

IN the cool of the early morning things were set going. First Aid packets were spread open; Rufe supplied an abundance of fresh-boiled water. Loyo was laid on the table, under the awning, and Grant Norris shaved the poor darkey's whole scalp, while a sharp knife-blade and a bit of wire hook were boiling on the stove. Then Norris and Wayne thoroughly cleansed their hands and arms to the elbow in hot water; Joe and Julian stood by to wait on the surgeons.

"Now, Wayne," said Norris, taking up the knife-blade, "I am going to open a little flap of scalp. Your touch is a little more delicate, and you feel about under the break for any bits of broken bone. Of course it's important to get every scrap, or the thing might prove a failure. So here goes."

Loyo did not wince; and soon Norris lifted the flap; and Wayne began to grope with his little hook, cautiously. In a moment he brought out a fragment of bone, half the size of his thumb. Not another bit could be find.

"Well," said Norris, finally, "from the look of things, that should be all anyway. Pull up a little on that edge

of bone — so. Now, Julian, that dish with the piece of rubber tubing.”

In a few minutes, with the rubber drain-tube at an end of the slit, a few stitches in the scalp, and the bandage was applied; and Loyo was gently lifted back to his pallet.

And then began anxious hours, and days, of waiting. Julian continued to be nurse in chief, and he had no lack of helpers; Rufe was most assiduous. All during those days of suspense there was no excursion from the schooner, except one, in the dark hours, to renew the supply of fresh water from a shore spring, and to recover the things left in the hollow oak. The *Mercier's* crew got an occasional glimpse of the Spaniards, down shore; enough to keep the boys from any thought of a spell of relaxation on the island. They employed themselves in various ways to relieve the tedium; largely in sea-craft under the tutelage of Captain Marat and Grant Norris. They improved the condition of the rigging, scraped and oiled the masts, and made better sailing rigs for the small boats. There was some fishing, not too close to shore; and here Marat's cast-net was brought to play, with the result that there were made a number of experts in its handling.

But the chief interest centered in Loyo; and the unmistakable signs of improvement put cheer into all the crew. And then came the day when triumph, in big letters, was written over the hopes of all.

On that morning, Norris, Wayne, and Julian held con-

sultation over Loyo, whom, until now, they had kept at absolute rest and quiet, at times much against his inclination to get about. The wound, from which the stitches had long ago been removed, was well healed; the look in his eyes had the normal knowingness; the movement of his arms, and his grasp, showed equal and much increased strength. For some time, the patient had been anxious to put his mental faculties to exercise in talk, but had invariably been cautioned to keep himself in a condition of sleep, as near as possible.

Now Norris gave the signal to remove all restraint, and directed Julian to encourage Loyo in talk.

"How do you feel, now, Loyo?" began Julian.

"I'm feeling just all right," smiled Loyo, "as I've been a-trying to tell you."

"Do you remember things now?" said Julian.

"Yes," said Loyo. "But there's some things ain't quite plain. Seems like I've been in a kind of laziness; my rheumatism put me a little out of my head, I guess."

Questioned, the darky recalled the events preceding the time he was struck down as he lay helpless under the rheumatism.

"Did you know," said Julian, "that Pedro is dead?"

"Seems somehow like I knowed that," returned Loyo.

"Do you feel tired," interposed Norris, "or does your head ache any from talking?"

"No," asserted Loyo. "I feel just all right."

"The word deafness is certainly all," observed Norris.

Norris wrote a sentence on a piece of paper.

"Can you read that?" said he, handing the paper to Loyo.

" ' Pedro ————— ' (and a blank space) ' gave me instructions, ' " read Loyo aloud.

"Suppose you fill in the blank space," said Norris.

"I suppose you mean that for the rest of his name," said Loyo. And so he took the pencil and wrote in *Lafayette*.

"Well, boys," said Norris, smiling, "the thing is a success."

And now Wayne brought out the copy of the letter addressed by Pedro to Loyo.

"Here is a letter to you, we found on the *Mercier* after Pedro died," said Wayne.

Loyo took the paper, expressing surprise that the secret drawer should have been discovered. But as his glance fell on the sheet, he looked up quickly to declare:

"This here ain't written by Pedro. This here ain't his writing."

"No," said Wayne. "That's a copy. Lafitte Goya took the original away from us."

Loyo read the letter through, and then showed signs of trouble.

"This here ain't got what Pedro said I was to find," said he. "This here don't tell me. It was the way it was wrote that was to tell me how to find the boy for Julian. And he told me some things so I could read it

the way he wanted. This here paper don't do any good. I've got to have the one he wrote. Oh, if he'd only just told me where he hid it! He said he would like to take me and show me the place, but he was a-feared something might happen so others might get it out of me before the time."

"Do you remember the directions," said Wayne, "so you can give them to Julian?"

"Yes, he told them to me so many times I couldn't forget," said Loyo. "But they don't do no good without I had the paper Pedro wrote."

"I remember some things a little odd about the original letter; but I don't remember exactly what they were," said Wayne, making visible effort to recall the appearance of the writing Goya had taken from him. "I thought it was just some peculiarity of his writing."

"Tell us what the directions were, Loyo," prompted Julian.

"That part is easy," offered Loyo. "Pedro said the shape of the writing would be like a map; and where there was the word 'sentinels' it meant *palms*; and capital T where there should be a small t, was the location of the palms: and a capital O where a small o should be, showed the location of a hole; and 'spar' meant a pine tree; and a capital F where a small f should be, showed the location of the pine; and a capital Q with wavy lines showed a spring; and an X showed the exact location."

There followed a minute's silence. The faces showed that the boys had begun to take Loyo's hopeless view of the thing. Julian finally again begged his friends to give it up and sail for home. There was no answer; and Wayne, taking the copy of the letter, sauntered away to the *Mercier's* bow. He blamed himself that he had not guessed that there was a hidden meaning in the peculiarities of that original writing of Pedro's. He recollected, in the first place, that there was irregular form given to the two paragraphs. Now what were they? He shut his eyes in the endeavor to bring them back. Presently the first paragraph seemed to take shape; and then the second, with less distinctness. And then a thought startled him. He called Julian.

"Julian," he said, when the latter came forward, "do you know the shape of the little island, south of this one? Is it something like an Indian arrow-head — like this?" And he drew the shape.

"Yes," said Julian, "that's about the way it's shaped."

Wayne then clambered down into one of the small boats, and rowed away northward, within the reef-line.

"There he goes," said Ray. "Going off to get up a brain-storm. Funny thing — he has to have lots of room when he thinks. I can't think at all unless I've got company. When he thinks, he puts things together; I can't think except to tear things to pieces."

"And that's no joke," broke in Charlie. "Mr. Norris, let me tell you what Doctor Stewart once said. He

said: "Ray, here, is the type of the humorist. Just let a fellow come along and show Ray his weaknesses—he'll tear him to pieces and show up those weaknesses, just as a cartoonist does with his pictures."

"There you go. You see," said Ray, addressing Norris, "that's the way they jump on me—even when I make a confession."

"Well," laughed Norris, "I'll bet they don't ever get much the best of you."

In the meantime, Wayne, out of earshot, threw out several heavy links of chain on a rope for anchor; and using a thwart for a table, set himself to the attempt to reconstruct Pedro's codex. Drawing on his memory, and on Loyo's account of the verbal directions he had of Pedro, he made a new writing. After a number of erasures and corrections, he viewed the result, breathing deeply of a sense of victory. And then, having been gone barely an hour, he pulled in his improvised anchor, and moved briskly toward the *Mercier*.

"There he comes," announced Ray. "Look at his stroke. Now fan everything, fellows; he's got something hot on."

But when Wayne got aboard, he went direct to Loyo, who sat leaning against the cabin. Loyo took the paper Wayne offered. He studied it for some time, and his face lighted up with gratified intelligence.

"That sure look more like master Pedro talked about," he said.

To Loyo - When you take up this letter
and the one I have addressed to Julian,
as I have instructed you, it will
be when I am dead. My con-
fession is there made
to Julian. Loyo, before
taking him back to
his home, go and dig
out the old copper coffer,
and put it in Julian's
hands. It holds all
I have wherewith
to repay him
for the years I
have taken out
of his life.

Do this last
act Loyo

for
me
✓

I charge you - re-
membering the
directions I
have
drilled into
your mind
go where the
sentinel now stand
watch, and a finger of
a lone spar points
to a quiet spot
unexposed
to the
sun
✓

"Explain it to me," said Julian, looking over Loyo's shoulder.

"Well," began Loyo, pointing to the first paragraph, "that's the general shape of the big island; and that," pointing to the second paragraph, "is the shape of the little island. And see them capital Ts in 'sentinels' and 'stand'—them's the palms. And that capital O in 'now,' between—that's for the hole. And that capital F in 'finger'—that's the spar; or like he said, the pine tree. And them wavy lines coming out of the capital Q—that's for the water. And the X—that's the exact spot where it's buried; and it's way down in the little island that's shaped some like an arrow. I reckon we're going to find the box for you now, Julian boy. It's all just as plain, like he said."

"It seems wonderful," said Julian, addressing Wayne, "that you could remember the way Pedro wrote the letter, when you didn't realize those capital letters meant anything peculiar."

"Well," returned Wayne, "we boys have practiced observing and remembering what we see, so it's a kind of habit. And what Loyo said caused me to remember that I noticed those capitals, which I had thought were just peculiar mistakes of Pedro's writing. As long as Loyo knew what the letters were, it wasn't so hard to find where they belonged—you know he mentioned 'sentinels' and 'spar.'"

The others had begun to flock round, so Wayne began to elucidate the things for them.

"He makes it look very easy," observed Norris to Ray.

"Yes," said Ray. "As the fellow said, it's easy when you know how. Next, he'll be telling us we could work it out just as easy, if we liked puzzles well enough. I'm thinking we'd like puzzles well enough, if for us they were as easy."

"You see," continued Wayne, "Pedro told Loyo that 'sentinels' meant palms, and it was natural he would put one of the capitals in that word; and the next *t* comes in 'stand,' and 'now' comes between. Make a capital O there, and we have the 'hole' with a palm standing watch on either side. Now *f* in 'finger' comes about under the O, so that is likely where capital F should be. Besides the word 'spar' (meaning a pine tree) is just under it. So F — the pine tree — is in front of the hole, and has a branch (for a finger) pointing to the hole. The only *q* to capitalize is in 'quiet,' and the only *x* is in the word 'unexposed,' and the 'wavy lines' of *q* go through or over *x* — I kind of remember that in Pedro's writing."

Wayne ceased there, as if he had concluded, so Joe spoke up.

"But I don't see the connection between the *q* and *x* and the rest," he complained.

"Well," said Wayne, "I guess Pedro knew that would

become plain to Loyo and Julian when they got down to the place. I've got an idea, but I'd like to keep it to myself till we are on the spot."

"There now, listen to him," said Ray. "It wouldn't be him if he didn't keep us guessing about something or other."

"Well, when are you going down?" queried Phil.

"Julian and Loyo, and Captain Marat will decide that," said Wayne.

"I theenk," said Marat, "thad thees letter of Pedro make Loyo thee captain of thees expedition. I only suggest thad we mus' theenk of those bad crew, who mus' now be on the guard, and not let our boys run too much thee risk."

"You-all," said Loyo, "have been very good to come to our help; and I can't tell you how I feel about your curing me of my trouble up here," putting his hand to his head, "and Julian and I are very anxious that these boys shall not be put into no danger. I know Julian would rather lose the treasure."

Julian strongly corroborated the statement; and the boys more strongly protested any such thought.

"If we could only induce those Dagoes to give up and git!" suggested Robert.

"Let Wayne alone," asserted Ray. "He'll rig up some scheme."

"Something like the fireworks," smiled Grant Norris. "It isn't hard to scare those fellows with something they

don't understand. But they're afraid of that pirate, Lafitte Goya — and the sneaking Gomez."

"Well, ain't you-all 'bout done wid all dat palaverin'?" called Rufe from the galley. "Dis heah dinnah's now a-waitin' fo' you."

For the first time Loyo took his place at table. And if any had any doubts as to his complete recovery his cheerful talk, his steadiness on his limbs, and his healthy appreciation of Rufe's cookery, would have been convincing.

The wind had swung round into the northwest, and accompanied by bundles of clouds, it brought a coolness, pleasantly putting the tail between the legs of a week of rather intense heat.

Early in the afternoon, Wayne became abstracted; at times he leaned pensively on the bow bulwarks. "Hatching something again," said Ray, pointing him out.

CHAPTER XXIV

SETTING UP A SCARECROW

WAYNE finally turned from his musing, and as he came aft, Ray again had to have his say. "Attention, fellows," said he. "He's bringing his eggs to market."

Wayne began by pumping Norris about the Spaniards under Lafitte Goya.

"Yes, they're superstitious," said Norris, "and rather easily scared by what they don't know the meaning of."

"Didn't you say something about their being pretty near tired of their hunt for the treasure?" questioned Wayne.

"Yes," said Norris. "They've been ready to throw it up a number of times. But Goya bullies them, calls them cowards, and threatens them. They don't like it, but they're afraid of their hides, and Goya knows it. If they had a leader they might turn on him. Once or twice I thought of leading them against him. But that would mean bloodshed, and I don't like to lead in anything that starts something like that. And then you can't depend on them to carry a thing through. If it goes through in a hurry without a hitch, all right. But if it don't, they're down and out. But sooner or later they'll do something."

"Maybe we can do something to hurry it up," suggested Wayne.

"Say, Wayne," broke in Ray. "You've got something up your sleeve. Let's have it."

"Well," evaded Wayne, "let's each suggest something, and put them all together and —"

"All right, let's have yours first," insisted the uncompromising Ray.

"Let's have it," said Norris.

Thus assailed Wayne complied.

"Suppose some of us slip down there in the dark," said he, "and give them a little mysterious jolt. Say — prepare a kind of little cemetery, with crosses for headstones, and the like; and hang up an effigy by the neck; and stick up a warning that this is a grave-yard prepared for the bunch of them — and so on."

"Gee!" shuddered Ray.

"That sure would make those fellows squirm," asserted Norris.

"And we might make some gun noise," added Wayne, "and set off a couple of palms."

"We'll do it!" enthused Norris. "I'll write the notice in Spanish, so they can all read it."

Preparations immediately went forward. An old pair of trousers and shirt were dug out; and a hat. A bit of rope, and some cord, and a shovel, completed the outfit. And Norris had soon written the paper.

The moon was in its first quarter, furnishing increasing

light, but was due to go down at midnight. It would not do to take the chance of the enemy seeing them rowing in to the beach, so it was wait till midnight to embark on the enterprise. By half past eleven the moon had dropped behind the range of hills, putting the lagoon in shadow; but the clouds had massed more, with seldom a break, and it was soon dark enough to venture.

Wayne, Norris, and Robert got down into the boat, followed by Joe and Ray, who were to ferry them across to the beach. The nor'wester spread a chill all over; the oarsmen sought warmth of their exercise, and the passengers shivered on the thwarts. But they were soon on the beach.

"Now," said Wayne, when he, Robert, and Norris had got their outfit out, "we may not be able to make it back to-night; so don't expect us till you get a signal. I may as well tell you — I have a notion to stay and see how they take it; and they might try to cut us off."

The three went south. Soon they turned, and passed over, between a pair of hill-tops, to the west side of the ridge. Wayne led with the bundle of clothes, Norris came next with his rifle, and Robert followed with the shovel and a hand-ax. It had grown quite dark, and they picked their way along the foot of the range with some difficulty, the flash-light being used very sparingly. They often stumbled on roots, unseen in the dark, and branches poked their faces. The exercise set the blood going and warmed them.

"The weather's a good friend to our enterprise," declared Grant Norris. "Those cold-blooded cusses'll never keep a sharp watch a night like this; they'll just huddle up on the lee side of a tree or something, and shiver like those hairless Mexican dogs."

"I hope the thing we've got for them," observed Robert, "will make them shiver for another reason."

"It'll do that," asserted Norris. "They don't like that sort of thing. Even if they saw it being rigged up, and by one of themselves, they'd say it was a bad sign. They're that superstitious."

The three had gone above two miles, and come out in a bit of grassy glade. Wayne flashed his light round an instant.

"Let's fix up our man here," he said. "There's plenty of dried grass."

So Norris and Robert began to collect the hay into a mound at Wayne's elbow, while he undid his bundle and set to work, stuffing the garments, including a pouch of canvas, for the head.

"That's enough grass," said Wayne, finally. "Now you fellows might get some sticks for crosses, while I finish this thing."

Presently a dozen rustic crosses had been constructed, the sticks tied together with cord.

"And now do you want to see our beauty?" said Wayne. "You throw a flash on it, Slicky."

Wayne held up the effigy; and the light illumined, under the hat, a cleverly painted death's head.

"Wow!" said Norris, in surprise.

"Charlie did that," said Wayne. "He's pretty good at the drawing."

"Well, that'll get those Dagoes right," said Norris. "Goya can tell them what he pleases."

They took up the march again, and it was not yet two o'clock when they found themselves at the edge of the forest, near the south end of the island, overlooking the habitation of the Spaniards. Many palms stood in groups, and singly, out beyond the undergrowth. They selected a spot among the palms, and just beneath an oak, as suited to their purpose.

"This looks good," said Wayne. "We can hang our man on that branch in the oak."

"Just the thing," agreed Norris. "Now I'll first take a peek around."

He stole along eastward, to opposite the long bunk-house, and then back, and down westward toward the mooring of the schooner *Miguel*; and was soon back.

"I don't think they're pretending to keep any lookout here," he said.

"Well, let's get busy," said Wayne. And he took up the shovel and began to dig in the sand.

Turn about, the three kept the shovel going an hour; and two rows of shallow graves, a dozen in all, resulted, a mound of sand beside each.

"And now the crosses," said Wayne.

At the one end of each grave they set up a rustic head-piece.

"Now let me see your rope," said Norris.

In a few minutes he exhibited, under Wayne's flashlight, a slip-knot of many turns of the rope.

"The hangman's knot," he explained. "I hope you'll never have occasion to make one."

He adjusted the noose, flung the rope, and directly, the effigy depended from the limb, over the first row of graves.

A little out from the tree, and in a position visible from the house, Norris drove into the sand a pair of sticks, some five feet in height. To them he pinned the paper: at the top a death's head and cross-bones, and below a notice written in Spanish. Translated, it went this wise:

BANDITS

Prepare yourselves. The cemetery is ready. The grave yawns for you. The rope is knotted. The time draws near. Pluto holds open the door of hades.

"Well, that's all ready," said Wayne. "And now I'll tell you what I'd like to do. After we stir them up, they won't come over here to see what's the matter before daylight, will they?"

"Not on your life," declared Norris. "Even Goya won't risk it before then."

"Well," pursued Wayne, "I'd like to hide somewhere

then, and see how they act when they do take this all in."

"And that's just what I've been thinking," said Norris. "Let me think a minute." Presently he said, "I'll tell you what it is: We can see down here pretty fair from the top of that last hill, and there's some bushes up there to hide in."

"And I've got my binoculars," said Wayne, "and so has Slicky. Now suppose we do this way: When you fire your rifle to wake them up, Slicky and I will make torches of a couple of palms. Then we can run down west to the point and fire another palm, so they'll think we've gone off in a boat there. And then we can cut back up through the woods and get up to the hill.

"Good!" declared Norris. "That'll sure keep Goya from looking for us."

It had soon come four o'clock.

"Now's a good time," said Norris. "An hour before sun-up."

Wayne and Robert each picked a cabbage palm with a profusion of dead, dried palm leaves below the green tops; and each took up a dried palm-fan for a lighter.

"All right," said Wayne.

"Now I'm going to fire three shots," said Norris. "And I'll put some leaks in their roof. Wait for a minute after the last shot."

The first report rang out sharp.

"Now some of those Dagoes are sitting up," said Norris. "'Diavolo!' some one is saying, I'll bet."

The second report cracked forth.

"Now they're *all* taking notice," said Norris.

The third shot banged ominously.

"Now they're all rushing for the windows and doors," said Norris, "and palavering like monkeys. Better let them have the rest of the fireworks."

First one and then the other of the palms flared up — a great flambeau of a few moments' life.

"Now they've got another big guess on," said Norris.

The three hurried off to the southwest, past the little house in which Wayne and Robert had their first taste of captivity.

"Do you remember that house, Slicky?" said Wayne.

"Never'll forget it," returned Robert.

Wayne struck a match and set another palm ablaze. The great mass of flame mounted high, and was gone in a moment.

"I guess they'll think there's a bunch of volcanoes erupting," observed Robert.

"They'll think it's the end of the world," said Norris.

"And now for the hill."

They went down to the beach and trotted north to the little stream that had twice before figured in the doings on the island. To cross it they must go inland some way; and soon they were pushing through the forest again, presently to come out at the foot of the hill. They climbed to its southern brow, and crawled into the bushes.

"We'll snuggle up close," said Norris, "and we won't notice the chill so much when we cool down."

They hadn't long to wait for the first signs of dawn. And so soon as there was sufficient light to bring out objects in the open spaces, the two pairs of binoculars — like big eyes peering out of the bushes — were brought to play on the region of the bunk-house. It was above a quarter mile down there, but the glasses made things come up, close; as it seemed, within speaking distance.

"They're there by the house," said Wayne, looking. He handed his glasses to Norris.

"Yes," said Norris, as he peered. "Goya's making them a harangue — calling them cowards, I'll bet. — There go two of them toward the woods — Goya's going behind them with a gun — driving them, that's what he's doing."

He handed Wayne his binoculars.

"They've got out of sight behind the trees," said Robert.

"They're having a look at their pretty representative, hanging in the tree," observed Norris, "and the cemetery. That won't make them happy."

"The others, back by the house," said Wayne, "are looking on mighty interested."

"There they go back," said Robert, and he offered Norris his glasses.

"No, I don't want them," said Norris. "Just tell me what you see."

"One of them's got the paper," said Wayne. "Goya's holding out his hand for it.—The fellow's pretending not to see Goya, looks like, and he's hurrying to the bunk-house with it."

"Now he's showing it to those fellows," said Robert, presently. "They're reading it."

"They're working their hands like sixty," said Wayne. "Seems like we ought to hear them talking."

"Telling one another it's a sign they're all doomed," declared Norris.

"Now Goya's preaching to them," said Robert. "I can tell — the way he waves his arms. And they act like they're mad."

"Goya's mad anyway," said Wayne. "See him shake his fist."

"You bet he's mad," said Norris. "Let me see your glasses."

Robert handed over his.

"He's calling them women — babies — fools — dogs; I know his talk," said Norris, looking. "But *that* won't do much good; it's his threats gets them."

"There he goes off — west, with some one behind him," said Wayne.

"That's Gomez," said Norris, "his dog."

"He's going down to where we fired that last palm," observed Wayne.

"Yes," said Norris. "He'll make up his mind some one went off in a boat there."

"The others are having some kind of a session," said Wayne.

"Trying to work up courage to go against Goya," said Norris. "They've tried that before."

The three continued their observation for half an hour, during which time the Spaniards very evidently kept up their excited chatter. Then Lafitte Goya and Gomez hove into view on the return.

"Well," said Norris, "we might as well hike. There's nothing more to see. Goya's not likely to give them a chance to get away today, if that's what they're wanting — and I'll bet it is. And he might take a notion to take a run up to the other end of the island."

So they crept back over the hill, going down the northwest slope. They were soon close to the mouth of the cave wherein Wayne and Robert had passed those days in chains. They pushed through the bushes and looked in.

"They've quit this hole, I guess," said Norris.

As they moved onward toward the north, they observed that the wind had swung round and was coming out of the southwest. The sky began to clear, the sun breaking through to drive off the chill. The watch showed past seven when they got to the beach, opposite the *Mercier*. There was no need to whistle, for they were immediately seen; and a boat put off to get them. Ray and Leslie were at the oars.

"Well," said Ray, as the adventurers climbed in, "how did it all come off?"

"Like a monkey sliding down an icicle," said Norris.

"It went smooth and to the point," interpreted Ray, pulling at his oars.

Breakfast was soon on the table, and the story of the night's adventure was told.

"Well, do you think they'll vamoose?" asked Ray.

"I can answer that they're strong in the notion," returned Norris; "and they'll do it if Goya goes to sleep before they get a little over the effect of this thing."

"You think they are scared?" asked Charlie.

"I know they are," declared Norris.

"But they may get over it if they don't clear out right away," observed Joe.

"They'll never get over it, when you come to that," said Norris. "And it'll have its effect in helping them finally to sicken of this job right, even if they don't go now."

CHAPTER XXV

ON THE LITTLE ISLE

ALL the day — which was August ninth — and half of the next, was given over to anxious waiting, in the timid hope that the superstitious crew down there would have taken the warning seriously, and that they would be in the way of abandoning the islands. During this time there was not a sight had of the enemy anywhere; and some one on the *Mercier* was almost always on the lookout, binoculars pointed southward.

“Maybe they’re gone,” said Leslie at last.

“Well,” said Grant Norris, “I say, let’s go down and see. This thing is getting tiresome.”

“Yes,” agreed Captain Marat, “we have good southwest wind; we can sail.”

The noon meal over, Captain Marat, Robert, Joe, and Charlie got into one of the boats, hoisted the sail, and made off around the broad north end of the island. In three quarters of an hour, they went about on the starboard tack, and made down the west shore.

The middle of the afternoon saw them off the southwest point — out of gun range — eyes eagerly watching the steadily opening mouth of the sound. For they were about to come into view of the *Miguel’s* anchorage.

Robert was the only one of the four who had been about this part of the island. He crouched in the bow, eyes to his glasses. "There she is — she's still there," he finally announced, a shade of disappointment in his tone.

Captain Marat brought the bow to the wind, and for some minutes he joined the rest in an examination of the schooner.

"They have made no preparation to sail away," he finally concluded. "Lafitte Goya have hees way yet."

Captain Marat got the wind into the sail again and put the boat a little more to the south, opening out the beach up to the enemy's quarters. Then they made out figures about the house, who soon gave evidence that the boat was seen; for they grouped themselves at the corner of the house, as if looking.

"Well, go about," said Marat. And he brought the bow into the wind, quickly filling the sail on the port. "We will go back."

The report they gave, when again they climbed aboard the *Mercier*, brought forth many expressions of disappointment; though at bottom, none had entertained more than a half hope that Lafitte Goya and crew had gone.

"Well, why wait any more," said Ray; "why not go down to the little island tonight and try for the box; and maybe we can sail for home tomorrow. We ought to make it, some way, over the reef; we came in over it."

There were objections to the plan, for reasons already

discussed: It was risky; Goya was likely to be much on the alert against any such move. Of course, the depressing effect on Goya's crew, of the warning, may have relaxed vigilance. But that effect must be wearing away somewhat; and the sight of the boat would doubtless set them on the watch again, and it would be hard to get by undiscovered.

"Well," said Norris, after there had been much discussion of Ray's proposal, "the longer we wait, the more those Dagoes'll be convinced that that graveyard warning was all a bluff. And I hate to hang back for such a crew."

And then finally it was determined to attempt an expedition to the small island that night. Had there been a suspicion of what would be the issue, it would not have been made.

A bright moon shone that night, due to set not much before half past one; there would be only four hours of real darkness. So at midnight, the treasure-hunting party sailed away in the small boat — Captain Marat, Julian Lamartine, Loyo, Wayne, Ray, and Bert. A pair of shovels and a pick were the tools taken; and Jean Marat brought his precious rifle. They had determined on the western route, as being the one less under the enemy's eye.

The sea lay bright under the moonlight, the breaking wave crests sparkling. The wind still held from the southwest. Captain Marat took the boat well to the

west before heading her to the south, hoping thus to avoid the observation of any of Goya's lookouts. By half past one, with the moon just gone down, the boat was somewhat more than two miles off the little island. Then Jean Marat set the boat's bow direct for the isle, the wind right behind. In twenty minutes she had cut through the breakers on the reef, and quickly drove on to the west beach, about five hundred yards above the south point of the isle.

"I hope they have not see us," said Marat, as all clambered out.

"Well, they couldn't see us coming in here anyway," declared Ray. "If they saw us when there was any light, they must have thought we were sailing for South America."

"I feel not so sure," observed Jean Marat. "Some one mus' stand the guard by the boat," he added.

"I'll stay by the boat," volunteered Ray.

"I better stay with you," offered Bert Hill.

"No, you go and help the others, Bert," said Ray. "I won't be lonesome."

Ray squatted on the sand by the bow of the boat, as the others plunged into the mirky brush, which here grew down close on the beach. Both Julian and Loyo were somewhat familiar with this isle — a mile and a half by a half mile in extent — though neither had been here for above a year. Loyo led the way into the interior, pushing through a broad patch of heavy undergrowth,

to come out, finally, into a more open tract of wood.

"Now we want to find a pine tree standing alone," said Wayne. "Too bad we couldn't come in daylight."

"I don't remember any pine tree standing alone," said Julian.

Neither did Loyo remember any such. "But there sure is one," he declared. "Pedro, he says so in the letter."

"Here are both pine and palm," observed Marat.

"They are not so close together up nearer the hills," offered Julian.

"Well, let's try up that way," said Wayne. "And we want to find two palms away from the others, and the lone pine somewhere near."

They moved northward, slowly, and in time the trees thinned, and a hill showed in outline against the stars.

"Here's some pine trees cut down," presently came from Bert.

"And there's a pine standing alone!" declared Wayne.

"Ah, yes," said Marat. "Pedro cut these pines so thad one should stand by heemself."

"And there's the two palms," said Wayne, sending a flash from his lamp around. "See there! he's cut down some palms too, to make the two stand separate."

Suddenly a shrill whistle — short as the report of a gun — startled the hunters. It came from some place far up the island.

"That's Ray!" said Wayne.

Jean Marat was already hurrying off. Wayne caught up with him; the rest followed, soon to be crashing through the heavy undergrowth, reckless of scratches or torn clothes. That sudden breaking off of Ray's alarm whistle had an ominous seeming. And it added to their alarm that the sound had come from so far from where Ray should be.

Jean Marat and Wayne were the first to break through on to the beach.

The boat was gone!

Wayne flashed his light on the sands. Foot-prints showed, going from the brush to the marks of the boat's prow.

Then all ran up the beach, Marat still in the van. Soon they brought up at the head of the island; and readily made out two shadowy objects moving away across the sound. They could hear the oars in the thole-pins.

"There they go," said Wayne.

Marat fired his rifle into the air, to acquaint Ray that his comrades had become conscious of his predicament.

"Thees is ver' bad," said Jean Marat. "And our boat, it ees gone."

"We'll signal the *Mercier*," said Wayne. "Norris will come with the other boat."

It was a much dejected five who turned back from the beach, and, led by Julian and Loyo, moved through the shore palms, and through the scattering pines toward the hills. Julian expressed great sorrow that it was in his

service that again one of his new friends had lost his liberty, and possibly put in jeopardy of his life.

"Don't talk any more like that," implored Wayne. "They won't harm him. Goya just wants one of us for a ransom for the treasure."

"Well, we'll give it to him," declared Julian.

"Please don't!" again begged Wayne. "That's all decided. We've beat them before — we can do it again, somehow. You can believe me — Ray would hate to be ransomed."

"I like ver' much to hear you talk thad way," said Jean Marat. "You ver' brave boys. We will make some way to get him free. Ah, you Goya, look out!" he added in apostrophe. And there was something ominous in his tone.

The party was soon at the foot of the northern slope of the first hill. At Wayne's behest each collected an armful of wood; and this they bore to the brow of the hill.

"I hope Slicky's keeping a good lookout, observed Wayne. And he set about the kindling of a fire.

Then, as Bert kept the flames concentrated, Wayne, with his jacket screened the fire from the *Mercier*, in the lagoon three miles to the north, and with swinging of the jacket, let out flash after flash in regular succession.

"Can they make out the signals so far?" asked Julian.

"Easily," said Wayne. "I hope rattle-brained Phil

isn't on watch. He's all right when he knows something's up; but when everything is quiet, he doesn't see anything is worth while."

When Wayne's arm tired, Bert relieved him at the signalling. For half an hour the signals flashed forth unanswered.

"I don't see what's the matter with them," complained Wayne. "We'll have to get them within an hour or it'll be daylight."

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Those left on board the *Mercier* turned from watching the sail of their comrades lose itself behind the point.

"Well, I hope they get down there without being seen," observed Norris.

"What would that Goya do if he saw them?" asked Phil.

"If he could make his outfit believe our fellows were going after the treasure down there, and pretty sure to find it," returned Norris, "he'd attack. They're a bunch of cowards generally; but if they see a chance for a handful of filthy lucre, they'll take chances all right, especially if they can do their shooting from cover. Well, whose watch — twelve to two?"

"Mine," said Leslie.

The rest were soon in the blankets. At two Leslie called Charlie.

"It's beastly dark," said Charlie, yawning. "Where's the moon?"

"Gone over half an hour ago," returned Leslie.

Charlie paced the deck for a time, to walk off his sleepiness. His thoughts turned back home, and he wished that he might send a letter to the folks, recounting the adventures of the *Mercier's* crew. Three o'clock passed, and the minutes rolled on to four, and still his thoughts lingered far away from the islands. At last he awoke from his reverie and set a light to his watch to find it pointing to a quarter past four. He started aft to call Phil. But he had not taken three steps, when a gleam of something came into the corner of his eye.

He stopped short. "Ah!" he said. "I'm a poor watch."

Then he ran; and instead of calling Phil, he aroused Robert. "Hurry up!" he said. "They're signalling!"

"What?" said Robert.

"They're signalling!"

Robert got on his feet with a jump. "I'll get a lantern," he said. "You call Norris."

The lantern was soon flashing forth answering signals. And all the company collected at the schooner's rail.

"Joe, help me read them," said Robert. "Charlie and Leslie, you take them down."

Slowly, Wayne's message took form on paper, thus:

Ray captured, boat gone. Norris and Slicky come. East side. W.

"Ray captured!" said Phil, slow to realize.

“And those Dagoes got their boat!” said Norris. And there was pent-up wrath in his tone. “Get the sail in, Slicky,” he added, going for his gun. “I’m getting my dander up,” he continued, coming from the cabin. “I’m tired of monkeying with those cusses. First chance I get I’m going to let something into Mr. Lafitte Goya. Rufe, we want grub—no telling just when we’ll be back.”

Norris and Robert got their sail up, and the remaining small boat went scudding southward, out beyond the reef.

Day dawned before the boat’s prow touched the sand of the east shore of the little isle. Wayne and Julian stood on the beach, waiting.

“They saw us,” explained Wayne. “Ray stayed by the boat, and they came over, landed on the north shore, and jumped on him from the bushes before he could whistle.” And the story was soon told.

“And now they’ve got the chain on Ray,” said Norris; and he compressed his lips in his wrath. “I like that boy,” he went on, “and I know what I’m going to do when I get the chance. We’ve been fooling with those fellows long enough.”

Julian went to the top of hill to join Bert in keeping watch across the sound, and Marat and Loyo came down to a council with Wayne, Norris, and Robert.

“Well, Wayne,” said Norris, “you’re the most resourceful, what do you suggest?”

"What do you think Goya will do if we leave here and go back to the *Mercier*?" asked Wayne.

Norris's answer was prompt.

"He'll come down here sniffing for that treasure. You bet he's got a guess what we came down here for. And if he doesn't find it, and thinks we've got it, he'll offer to give up Ray for it. He isn't afraid of our running away without Ray."

"Well then," said Wayne, "suppose we try to locate the treasure now; and later, most of us sail back to the *Mercier*—three or four stay here. Goya will think we've all gone, and he won't take so many over here, if he comes to hunt. We can stick up another warning for them, telling them about our wireless, and that if they don't set Ray free within a certain time, we can telegraph to a gunboat to come and get them for the murder of the two Japs. And then maybe they'll clear out, too."

"They'd be sure to," suggested Robert, "if we could only get a good big ball chained to Goya's ankle so he couldn't interfere."

"A nice little lead ball might do," offered Norris.

"Yes," said Marat, and he smiled a sinister smile. "Thad is id—one liddle lead ball. Maybe it can be arrange'." And he mused on the thought.

No more promising plan than Wayne's could be offered; so they began at once to act on it.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE COPPER COFFER — A SURPRISE FOR THE ENEMY

THE boat was pulled high on the beach, and Robert climbed the hill, to send Julian to join the others. Then, Wayne, Marat, Norris, Loyo, and Julian took up the march to the south. On this side of the hills the brush grew not so rank, and they made good progress in the forest, oaks, pines, and palms predominating.

They were soon to the south of the last hill, where it was a bit more open. The heavy growth of the west side extended itself round the foot of the hill; and in the midst, a little stream purled, coming, it seemed, from nowhere.

Wayne pointed out the lone pine, made lone by the felling of four or five others; and close to the brush and the hill's foot, the two palms. Daylight now made them conspicuous, identifying them more surely with Pedro's description.

"There's the pine (the 'lone spar')," said Wayne. "And there are the two palms (the 'two sentinels'). And now you can see what he meant by 'a finger' pointing: That horizontal branch of the pine points in between the two 'sentinel' palms. There's the place."

"Yes," said Loyo, "that's just like Pedro meant. I am sure on that."

Wayne led the way into the brush, between the palms. Laboring over a bit of boggy ground, they stepped over the small stream, and directly, they found themselves before a hole in a broken point of the hill. The opening was partially grown over with vines.

"That," said Wayne, "is what Pedro meant by 'a quiet spot unexposed to the sun'—a cave."

"That's just it," said Loyo. "He never told us he found a cave down here."

Pushing aside the vines, Wayne led the way in, stooping. As usual, the roof soon heightened, and they were able to stand erect. Wayne flashed his lamp, moving forward; and presently a stream showed before them, trickling into the ground at the side.

"There's the water from the spring Pedro told you about, Loyo," said Wayne.

"Yes, sir, that's sure it," said Loyo.

"And now to find the spring," pursued Wayne.

The party had traversed the passage some two hundred feet, when they came to the end. And here Wayne threw a light on a spot where the water bubbled out.

"There it is," spoke Wayne.

"That's sure it," declared Loyo.

"The capital Q is for the spring," said Wayne, "and the wavy lines for the water; and the X right in the water, close to the spring. There it is on the paper."

And he directed the light on the paper, so the others could see.

"Then," observed Julian, "the box must be under the water."

"Must be," agreed Wayne. "It's sand bottom," he added.

"You better try for it," said Norris, handing Julian the shovel.

Assisted by an occasional flash of Wayne's lamp, Julian began to dig in, below the water, close to the spring. The shovel was soon down half a foot.

"I don't reckon it's any deeper'n that," said Loyo.

"Better try a little farther away from the spring," suggested Wayne.

So Julian again set in his shovel, a little below. A few inches, and the spade struck something harder than sand. He then dropped the shovel and plunged his hands in the water. He pulled out some pieces.

"Oyster shells," said all the eager onlookers, together, when Wayne's light flashed on the find.

"See what's under," said Wayne.

Julian was already delving with his hands again. "The light, Wayne," he said.

He was rubbing something as the light flashed, showing through the water, a flat surface of reddish hue.

"It's the box!" broke from the sundry throats.

"Yes," said Loyo. "It's that copper box of his, I see so many times. Thank the Lord!"

"Well," said Jean Marat, "like Wayne have sugges', it may be more safe whar it lie for the presen'. And eef we cannot scare away those of Goya, we can try once more in thee dark."

"Yes," said Loyo, "that is best."

So the box was again covered, and the stream continued to flow over it, as the party made its way out of the cave into the day again.

And now it came time to decide who were to remain on the isle, and who go back to the *Mercier*. Marat drew Norris to one side, and for some minutes they debated something between them. When they came back to the others, Norris made an announcement.

"Captain Marat and I," he said, "have a little amendment to your plan of action, Wayne, which we have decided to keep to ourselves for the present. You'll learn what it is at the right time. And now it is to be decided who of us two is to stay here."

"I have sugges'," interpose Jean Marat, "thad the bes' shot weeth the rifle stay here. We can each take one shot at the mark, and thee one who make the bull's-eye, he stay."

Wayne smiled as he recollected the sample of Marat's shooting he had witnessed up on the Florida coast.

"You might as well save your ammunition, Mr. Norris," said Wayne. "I have seen him shoot."

"Well, that doesn't sound encouraging." And Norris

scratched his head. "But let's try for it; if he beats me, I won't feel so disappointed over not staying."

Wayne began to have a suspicion. His thought gave his face a look of anxiety, so Jean Marat spoke up.

"Ah, Wayne," he said, "you need not be 'fraid. We do not plan something ver' serious. It all right, you will see."

And so a pine was blazed — for a mark — some two hundred yards away, and a match stuck in the center, showing its colored fire end. A toss-up gave Norris the first shot. He took careful aim, and fired. Julian and Wayne ran to inspect.

"An inch above the match," reported Wayne.

"If you so good as tie me, Captain," Norris smiled, "I'll give it to you."

"You fin' the madch all right?" Marat questioned Wayne.

"Yes, the match is still there," returned Wayne.

Marat gave a little sniff of satisfaction. And with that he raised his rifle. Next instant it cracked. Then all hastened down to the tree.

Wayne was highly entertained with watching Norris's expression of face, when he approached the pine.

"By jove!" said Norris, squinting close. "If he hasn't driven part of the match into the tree! Say, Captain, you're a fiend of a shot!"

"My rifle, he never mees," returned Marat. "Eef

you shoot jus' so much weeth thees gun, you can do jus' thee same."

And so it was decided: Marat was to stay and keep watch over the treasure, and Loyo, Wayne, and Bert with him. They all returned to the boat; and Wayne went to the hill-top, and sent down Robert, who was to go with Norris and Julian back to the *Mercier*.

Before leaving, Norris made, and left with Marat, a copy of the new notice, in Spanish, which he meant to get into the hands of the men on the big island. Here is how the English version reads:

NOTICE

We have on the *Mercier* wireless telegraph, by which we can communicate with all vessels that have instruments. We give you twelve hours in which to free our comrade and leave the islands. Then, if you do not comply, all we have to do is to telegraph to a gunboat; and they will come and take you all, to be hung for the murder of the two Japanese.

This is a final warning.

It was just past ten o'clock when Norris, Robert, and Julian sailed out over the reef, on the return to the *Mercier*. Marat and Loyo climbed the hill to join Wayne and Bert on watch. And they were all very careful not to betray their presence on the isle, as they brought two pairs of binoculars to play, to observe what the enemy should do when the boat passed, going north.

"They'll think there's nobody left here, when they see

the boat is gone," observed Wayne. "What do you think Goya will do, Loyo?"

"I reckon likely he'll get ready to cut off the *Mercier*, in case she comes down to try and get out of the lagoon by the east passage," returned Loyo. "And Gomez knows the schooner can't get round the northwest corner of the island and come down the west side; so all he has to do is set a watch on the east side. And then I reckon —"

Here Bert broke into the talk, his eyes still at his glasses.

"They see our boat now," he said, "and they're walking up the beach to watch our fellows."

"Well then," pursued Wayne, "Goya will figure it out that if we've got the treasure, we'll try to run the *Mercier* out of the lagoon, ready to get away."

"Yes," said Loyo.

"But," continued Wayne, "he knows mighty well we'll not go and leave Ray."

"Jus' so," said Marat, and he put down the binoculars he had been using. "He know we do not abandon our comrades. But jus' like Loyo say, he weel watch to keep thee *Mercier* inside the lagoon till he make some way to get the treasure. And he weel be not so sure we have the treasure yet."

"But," added Wayne, getting the drift, "he'll suspect we got on the trail of it down here; and he'll likely come and try to pick up the track himself."

"Jus' so," affirmed Marat. "He weel depend that we leave some mark where we have been."

"They're getting a boat ready," reported Bert. "And I can see our other boat, pulled up close to the pile of oyster shells."

Marat again took up the glasses.

"Yes," he said. "Goya make prepare to come now, I theenk."

Marat seemed to find some satisfaction in the thought, for there was half a smile in his face as he watched the preparations over there. When four of the men had pulled their boat to the water, they went to the house, directly returning, variously equipped. Two bore shovels and a pick, it appeared, and two were armed with rifles. Goya came behind, also rifle laden.

Before entering the boat, Goya turned, and was seen to gesticulate to three others, who, also armed with rifles, were making off toward the east shore. "Shouting orders to them about watching the *Mercier*," was Wayne's interpretation.

Goya's boat pushed off, two of the men took the oars, and the prow was pointed diagonally across the sound.

"They're coming down the west side," said Wayne.

"Yes," said Captain Marat. "And now we have to move. Bert, I theenk better you stay on the wadch here; and thee res', we go down and make something prepare' for thad Goya."

And so Marat led the way down the east slope of the

hill, Wayne and Loyo following. There was no word spoken during the whole march down to the region of the cave; but Wayne was busy brooding over Captain Marat's purposes, which, as Marat's demeanor argued, must be of a very definite nature. He took some comfort of the captain's cheerful confidence; but he could not forget the sinister look of Norris, when he confessed a secret understanding between himself and Jean Marat.

The three were soon amongst the heavy growth that barred the passage to the cave. Marat then stepped down through the open space to a pine something under two hundred yards to the south. And on the trunk he fastened the copy of the notice of warning which Norris had penciled. Returning, he stationed Wayne and Loyo behind trunks of trees.

"Now, Wayne," said Marat, "w'en they come, I going to make my gun to talk once — to make accentuat' to thee warning on the tree. Be ver' careful and keep yourse'f behin' the tree then."

Jean Marat then took up his own position in a screen of brush, away to the right. And the wait began.

Wayne was blessed with patience above the average lad of his age; but the uncertainty as to what was coming, and withal, the apparent certainty that it was not to be in the nature of a game of "ring around the Rosy," kept Wayne in a fevered state. And so the twenty or thirty minutes seemed to loiter in even more exasperating

fashion than had time during his confinement in that cave of the other island.

But finally the curtain lifted. Wayne kept his eyes on the fringe of rank growth over west. Suddenly, some way down, there broke into the open a figure, then four others — Lafitte Goya and his men. Goya had his eyes on the ground, as he appeared. But now he lifted them to take in the prospect just opened to him. A few moments' gaze, and his eyes went to the ground again, and the party moved forward.

They had not gone far, when Wayne saw one of the men suddenly point, as if to the tree on which Marat had pinned the notice. Goya moved forward quickly, and soon had the paper in his fingers, and began to read, the other men peering eagerly over his shoulders.

When Goya looked up from his reading, the others shrank back, looking about in a manner apprehensive.

It was then Jean Marat pushed out from his screen of bush into the open, his rifle at ready, and in a manner of challenge. Lafitte Goya saw him, and jerked his gun to his shoulder. The two rifles cracked closer together than two ticks of a watch. But it was Marat's got the mark.

Wayne saw Lafitte Goya sink to the ground, grasping his foot. But then, mindful of Marat's caution, he withdrew his head and held himself close up behind his tree-trunk. There came a volley from the enemy. Then

Wayne peered out cautiously, to see Goya's men scampering for the cover of the brush whence they had come. Marat, he saw, was now sheltered by a stump.

Goya had rolled behind the pine. But very soon Wayne saw him, too, crawling off, apparently dragging one leg as he went. And at last he was swallowed up by the brushwood.

It was then Wayne became conscious that he had discovered Norris's and Marat's secret. They had planned to cripple Lafitte Goya, and so put an end to the fear of him that so much possessed his men. With Goya put out of the power of activity to interfere, the men would follow their own inclinations, which the *Mercier's* crew hoped would take the form of flight. And he found much satisfaction in the thought that Marat had so contrived that Goya should make the first move to shoot.

Directly, Wayne heard Jean Marat's voice calling him and Loyo to follow, as he meant to crawl through the brush to a vantage point by the beach, and so observe what should become of the enemy.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MESSAGE ON THE ARROW — THE *MIGUEL* SAILS

N O sooner had Norris, Robert, and Julian got their boat over the reef, and their sail trimmed, than Norris — at the steering oar — set the boys at so disposing hats and jackets as to make it appear — from a distance — that the skiff bore a goodly number of passengers.

“May as well do all we can to make those Dagoes believe we’ve all left the little island,” he said.

He kept the boat well out to sea, to cripple the vision of the enemy. They were soon well in view of the bunkhouse.

“There they are — they see us,” said Robert.

“They’re going up the beach,” added Julian.

“Wondering if we’ve got the treasure,” said Norris.

“Come on, you loggerheads; take a look at our hat shop.”

“Goya will soon be going down to the little island to see what we’ve been doing,” observed Julian.

“Yes,” agreed Norris, “and he’ll meet up with some kind of a surprise when he gets there.— Well, we’ve got to hurry and fix up *our* little entertainment for those that stay behind.”

"I wish I could see something of Ray," said Robert. "I wonder where they've got him?"

"You'll never pick him out with your binoculars," offered Norris. "They've got him in the bunk-house, under a guard. And I'll bet they wish they had a chain for his tongue," laughed Norris.

"Yes, they'll worry Ray *nix*," said Robert. "It wouldn't be Ray if he didn't get some fun out of even those fellows."

"Haul in a little on the sheet, Julian," said Norris, veering some toward the coast. "We'll soon be there."

The boat had left the lower end of the island far behind, and soon it splashed through the breakers on the reef, and covering a short space of the lagoon, nestled up to the side of the *Mercier*. Joe, Phil, Leslie, Charlie, and Rufe stood by the rail.

"What luck, fellows?" said Phil.

"And where are the others?" from Charlie.

"Oh, we left them to guard the treasure," said Robert.

"And what about it — did you find it?" said Joe.

"Yes, we located it," returned Norris.

"Hurrah!" cried Phil. "Where is it?"

The sail furled, the three tumbled over the *Mercier's* rail, and the story was soon told.

"And now," said Norris, "we've got to hustle and do our bit."

Rufe hurriedly fixed up a snack; and before noon had

passed, Leslie and Charlie rowed Norris, Robert, Joe, and Phil to shore.

"Now, boys," said Norris, as Leslie and Charlie prepared to row back to the schooner, "don't worry about us; we may stay some time. Just keep a lookout. Good-bye."

The shore party made across the ridge, and went at a good pace down the west side of the hills. Norris bore Goya's rifle; the others were unburdened. They trudged on above a mile, in silence, each busied with his own thoughts.

"Now, I've been thinking," then said Norris, "about how we're going to get this notice to those fellows. We want them to get it and read it in a hurry. We want to rush the thing while everything is hot."

"Shoot it to them on an arrow," suggested Robert. "Can't we make a bow?"

"Good!" said Norris. "The stem of a palm leaf will make a good bow; but we've got to have a cord."

"I always carry some in my pocket," said Robert.

Joe proclaimed that his pockets also held cord, and of various sizes.

"Well, here's the place," said Norris, "where we stopped to stuff our effigy, when we went down to give those Dagoes that other invite to dig out. We'll make our preparations here again."

Joe had soon fashioned the bow; for it meant merely to cut notches for the string at either end of a length of

palm-leaf stem. And Robert found a handful of strong, straight reeds, which made very good arrows. Robert practiced with the improvised arm, and found that he could send the arrows a goodly flight.

"That'll do our business," declared Norris. "We can easily get one of those to the house from some cover."

The march was resumed. Twenty minutes' walk brought the four close to the southern end of the forest, and at the very edge of the screening undergrowth. The bunk-house was in view; and Norris pointed out to Joe and Phil the mounds that marked the little make-believe cemetery. But Robert was pointing to another object.

"Yes, by jove!" said Norris. "There's the effigy still hanging in the tree. They're too superstitious to touch it."

"Gee!" said Phil. "Don't half blame them; it's an ugly-looking thing. And see how it swings when the breeze hits it."

Robert had his binoculars turned across the open space to the house. "Don't see a soul," he said.

Norris tried a look. "I hope they haven't *all* gone down to the little island," said he.

"What would they do with Ray?" questioned Joe.

"Oh, they're in the house, or on the other side, I guess," said Norris. "Let's crawl down to the bunch of brush, out there. That's as close as we can get."

Presently all four crouched in the shelter of the clump of brush.

"Better try the range with an arrow," suggested Norris, "while no one's looking."

Robert let fly one of the arrows; and it went fairly under the shelter where stood the long table.

"Fine!" declared Norris. "Now let me have your best one."

Norris produced the paper on which he had written the notice — the exact copy of the one he had left with Jean Marat, on the little island. He wound the paper round the arrow and tied it smooth, and then handed it to Robert.

"Now we've got to attract them if they're there," he said. "Phil, you've got a good bellows, let's hear you breathe in your whistle.—Wait till Slicky's ready."

Robert set the message-bearing arrow to the bow-string.

"Ready," he said.

Phil then put his whistle to his mouth. The result sent a flock of cranes into the air. And directly, two forms appeared round the corner of the house; another came out the back door.

"Now, Slicky," said Norris.

Robert pulled on the bow-string. The arrow went out on its curved flight, and struck somewhere close to the table. The men were seen to dive for it. In a few moments the boys' binoculars revealed the interesting expressions in some of the faces, as the men held the unrolled message of warning up to a reading.

"It's doing its work, I guess," said Norris, as he gazed through the glasses.

"Yes," said Joe, "just watch their mouths going."

"And they do a lot of talking with hands too," said Robert.

"Yes," said Norris. "You tie a Dago's hands and he's as dumb as a cracked bell that's lost its clapper. Say, I've just *got* to have a shot at something. Now just watch that cook-house smoke-stack."

He raised his rifle and fired.

"A miss," and "No go," declared the boys.

"Don't tell Marat," begged Norris. "But now look again."

Norris fired again.

"There! You plunked a hole right through her!" said Phil.

"But to see the men get inside at the first shot!" said Joe.

"Now back to the woods, boys," said Norris.

Crawling and running, heads down, they got back in the shelter of the forest.

"Now then," began Norris, as the four stopped amongst the trees, "we can climb this last hill, and get into the low brush and see what'll be doing."

On the way, Joe found a spring, at which he replenished his canteen; and when they had gained the vantage point on the hill's brow, they made a meal out of their pockets, as they watched. The house and most of the

south beach was in view, and as well the schooner *Miguel*, where she lay at anchor, down near the point. But again there was no sign of life anywhere, that they could see.

"I guess they'll keep under cover for a little while," said Norris. "But," he added, "I'd give something to know what's going on down on the little island."

"I'll bet that Bert or somebody is on that hill down yonder," said Robert. "I could easy see him with the glasses if he was to stand up — it's only a mile and a half. But of course he's keeping down just as we are."

And then a long hour, the hottest of that August day, passed slowly on without any sight of those at the bunk-house. It was Joe that aroused the others to a sitting posture with an announcement.

"There's a boat!" he said.

Other eager glasses joined his, to watch the coming of a boat round the northwest point of the little island.

"It's Goya's crowd," said Norris.

The oars flashed in the sun, as the boat came steadily nearer. When it touched the beach, men from the house hurried down. And then the boys saw them lift a man from the boat and bear him toward the building.

"That's Goya, his fangs pulled," declared Norris; and his tone and manner showed his satisfaction.

"I don't see how you can tell," said Joe, dubiously. "Phil's glasses aren't any stronger than mine."

Norris laughed. "You see, I've a little double sight of my own." And he winked slyly.

Robert looked round from where he crouched in the brush; and his eyes shone with a sudden, new light.

"Aw!" he said. "Now I know why you and Captain Marat wanted to find out who was the best shot. And I guess I know what you were getting your heads together about, down there."

Smiling, Norris nodded confession to Robert's implication. And then he related to the boys how he and Marat had agreed between them that there appeared to be but one way to break Lafitte Goya's power over his men.

"You see," said Norris, "the men would have cleared out before this, if Goya hadn't got them cowed. And Captain Marat and I figured that if we could cripple him a little, enough so he couldn't get round — why, the men would up sail and light out the next time they got good in the notion. And I guess our notice of warning — about the wireless and the gunboat — will do that business, now they've got it."

"Well, then Captain Marat did it for Goya down there," ventured Robert.

"Yes," assented Norris. "He was going to lay for him and give him a lead pill in the foot. And I guess he did, all right. I never saw a fellow shoot like he can. Of course it isn't pleasant to take a pot-shot like that, but —"

"Well, he deserved worse than that," declared Phil.

(Of course, it was not till later that Norris learned that Marat had given Goya his chance.)

For some little time, there was no further movement visible down at the house. Then suddenly several of the men appeared out at the back; and at once there began the business of pulling things out of the cook-house.

"By Jove! the thing's working all right, or I'm mistaken," said Norris. "They're after the stores."

"There's a fellow with a rifle," said Robert, "going down toward the house from the east shore."

"Been watching the *Mercier*," suggested Norris. "He'll soon get some news."

The man disappeared from view behind the house. But soon he, or another, was seen hurrying back eastward.

"There he goes back to tell the rest of the guard," said Joe.

The men down at the house were now seen to be carrying goods round the corner of the building.

"That settles it — they're going to clear out," said Norris.

"Look there!" bade Robert. "I see our fellows on the hill down there."

The three pairs of binoculars were trained on the highest point of the little island.

"Suppose we signal them," said Robert.

"Go to it," returned Norris.

"Come on, Joe." And Robert led the way, crawling back out of view of the house, but still keeping in view of the hill-top on the little isle.

With a signal-flag tied to a stick out of the brush, Rob-

ert had soon got the attention of those on the island below.

"Tell them about the stores," called Norris. "And as soon as the Dagoes have gone, we're coming after them."

The slow exchange of signals was finally completed, and Joe and Robert crawled back to their comrades.

"What did they say?" questioned Norris.

"Only, 'Glad' and 'No hurry,'" returned Robert.

Half the afternoon was now gone, and the sun was losing some of its intensity. There was an end to all visible activity down at the house; and, except once, when some one visited the well, for some hours, scarcely a bird was to be seen moving near the place. The boys grumbled, now and then, over the suspense.

"Maybe they aren't going, after all," suggested Phil.

Norris shook his head. "I guess maybe they're waiting for dark," he said. "Goya can't interfere; he's got all he can attend to, you bet, in his leg."

The sun was gone pretty low, when some one appeared at the back. And directly, smoke came out of the cook-house stack."

"They haven't lost their appetites, anyhow," said Phil. "I wish Rufe would bring us something good."

"I hope they're treating Ray right," said Joe.

"Yes," said Robert. "But they didn't starve Wayne and me none, even if the cooking wasn't exactly like Rufe's."

“And Ray’ll get it out of them somehow,” said Norris, “trust him for that.—I guess we’ll have him with us again tonight.”

The sun set, and dusk came on, and still there were no signs of a final pulling up stakes on the part of the enemy below.

“Well, boys,” then said Norris, “we’ll have to get down there somewhere, if we’re going to see anything right. The moon’s pretty bright, but the shadows are all the blacker; and we can hide among the trees.”

So down the hillside and through the forest the four went, finally to take a stand in the dark shadows close to the swinging effigy again. The figure hung there, an eerie mass, sometimes spinning round as a moderate puff caught it in the clothes; now and again a moonbeam struck, and lighted, the death’s-head face of it.

Here again there was a long, uninterrupted wait. At Norris’s suggestion, the watchers took turns, two and two, for some sleep.

“We could all go to sleep here,” said Norris, “for all chance of being bothered by those fellows—with that thing hanging there.”

It was half after two, the moon just gone down, when Robert shook Norris and Phil awake.

“I just heard a noise from the boats,” explained Robert.

“There it is again,” said Joe. “Sounded like throwing in oars.”

“Yes, I heard that,” said Norris.

Ten minutes passed, and they made out two dark masses moving westward along the shore; and they heard the muffled sounds of the oars in the thole-pins.

“They’re off at last,” said Norris.

The four stole on in the shadows, and presently passing the little house toward the west, stopped opposite the schooner *Miguel*. Soon they heard voices from the *Miguel*. Next came the rattle of the anchor chain. Then the schooner began to move toward the passage.

“Towing her out,” suggested Norris.

After a time came the distant rattle of the blocks.

“The sails are going up,” said Robert.

And then the dark mass of the *Miguel* gradually faded away to the west.

“Well, boys,” said Norris, “they’re gone.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

NEWS OF RAY

THE boys responded to Norris's annunciation with sighs of relief.

"I never felt so good!" declared Phil. "I wish I could holler."

"I always knew we'd beat them," said Robert.

"And now for Ray," said Joe.

All turned and walked briskly back toward the bunk-house. They had barely turned the nearest corner of the house, when Norris, spreading his arms, brought a halt.

Light shone out of a near window. Norris crept forward and looked in on empty bunks. The light came from the far end. He led the way thither.

"I believe they're all gone, but it looks like they left Ray a light," he said, as he went.

The curtain was drawn over the end window; but through an interstice at the edge, Norris could see a bed illumined by a candle. And there lay Lafitte Goya, a pair of revolvers on the blanket, within reach of his hand. Goya groaned and swore alternately. Once he seemed as if going to rise, but fell back with a groan.

"Come behind me, Slicky," said Norris. "Joe, you knock on the window when I get to the door."

Norris, rifle at ready got round to the door, Robert at his back. Then came a knocking at the window, near Goya's head. Norris pushed open the door and stepped in; and, moving down between the bunks, he commanded Goya to hold up his hands.

Robert, without awaiting a bidding, hurried forward and snatched up the two revolvers from beside Goya. Joe and Phil were summoned in, and all looked about for Ray. There was none but Goya visible in the house. Robert ran up and down among the bunks with his flashlight. No Ray there.

Norris then demanded of Goya the whereabouts of the prisoner.

Goya shook his head. "I don' know. I don' see w'at they do." And he wandered off in a storm of cursing, directed against those who had abandoned him.

"I don't believe they took him along," said Norris. "Wouldn't do them any good."

"Maybe they freed him, and he's gone up to the *Mercier*," suggested Robert.

Norris turned again to the groaning Goya.

"Did they free the prisoner?" he demanded.

"Na-na!" broke out Goya, in the impatience of his pain. "I don' see w'at they do." And again he mixed groans with cursing.

Robert slipped out, and directly returned with the information that the *Mercier's* second boat lay by the shell pile, the oars and sail still in it.

"Well," said Norris, "suppose you and Joe row over after Wayne and the rest. Phil and I'll stay here."

Four pairs of hands grasped the boat, and dragged it to the water. It was a row of but a third of a mile. About midway of the passage, Robert blew a shrill blast of his whistle. This was answered from the hill of the little isle. Then he blew a signal—"Come."

When the boat touched the beach, the two boys had not long to wait. Wayne, Captain Marat, Bert, and Loyo were soon heard to holla, back among the palms.

"Here!" called Joe and Robert.

"What's the news?" said Wayne, coming up.

"They've sailed away," said Robert. "And they left Lafitte Goya in the house. He's in bed cursing them, and groaning with a sore foot. Ray isn't there—no sign of him."

"Maybe they free' heem," said Marat, "and he have gone to the *Mercier*."

All had embarked, and the boat moved back across the sound again.

"That's what we suppose," said Robert.

"Won't Goya tell?" asked Wayne.

"He says he doesn't know," returned Robert; "doesn't know anything except that he's been abandoned and has got a big pain in his foot."

"Ha! thee plan work ver' good," said Marat.

Again the boat touched the beach, and all gathered in the bunkhouse, where lay the groaning Goya.

But little time was given to mutual explanations, and a final attempt was made to gain news of Ray from Lafitte Goya, who again impatiently protested ignorance. Then, on Captain Marat's suggestion, Norris and Robert hoisted sail in the recovered boat and voyaged to the *Mercier*; first to seek news of Ray, next to navigate the schooner down to a new anchorage between the islands.

Day was dawning as the boat moved away. Wayne, Bert, and Loyo turned from the beach into the house. Goya continued to give expression to his pain in groans. Wayne addressed Marat.

"I'd like to dress his foot," he said.

"Yes," said Marat, nodding.

Goya's boot had already been cut away from the foot. The self-styled pirate descendant offered no protest, as Wayne unwound a filthy rag from the injured member. Joe and Phil got out to the cook-house, and soon had water boiling; and Loyo made a hurried trip to the little house down the beach for some clean white cloth. The rifle-ball had torn through the flesh of the foot's sole, making a painful wound; letting out considerable blood, thus furnishing a leak to most of the spunk of this miserable outcast. The wound was soon cleansed, and a clean white bandage covered the foot. Goya's lessened pain was shown in the greatly lessened groaning. But if he was grateful, he showed nothing of it.

Loyo and Joe, the while, were busying themselves in the cook-house, with preparing a meal out of some stores

left there. Joe suddenly burst into the house with a paper in his hand.

"Found it pinned on the outside of the back door," he explained.

Marat took the paper in his fingers and gave it a moment's study.

"Ah!" he said, "thees is sign' by Gomez. It ees in Spanish. He say he weel sell to us the 'much talk' prisoner for hees (Gomez's) life. And he say, sen' the answer by one boy — alone, who shall go in the forest back of the little house; and then he should make whistle, and Gomez, he come."

"Then they left Gomez behind, too," observed Wayne; "and Ray's all right."

"Yes," said Marat. "And he have take Ray into the forest for ransom for hees life."

Loyo was setting the food on the table under the shelter at the back. While they ate, Jean Marat and the boys discussed their new situation, especially with relation to the two of the enemy camp left behind — the worst of the lot.

"We could lan' them on the coas' some place," Marat was saying, "but thee boat they sail here in is down on thee beach; and I theenk they be ver' glad if we led them go 'way in thad."

Wayne insisted on his selection for the one to go to meet Gomez. And he was soon moving down the path, now in broad day, to the little structure where he and

Robert had first slept on their coming to the islands. Arrived at the house, he passed in among the oaks and palms at the back. When he had come to the fringe of the underbrush, he put his signal-whistle to his mouth and blew two blasts; then waited.

Some minutes passed, and he heard a crackling in the brush. Directly, Gomez appeared. The man crept forward cautiously, holding a rifle in his hands, and looking about as if fearful of an onslaught.

"It's all right," said Wayne. "I'm all alone — and I'm not armed."

"You fin' w'at I write?" said Gomez.

"Yes," said Wayne.

The man stood silently attentive, waiting on further speech from Wayne.

"We have decided," continued Wayne, "if you free our comrade, we'll let you go."

"You led me go 'way — sure?" persisted Gomez.

"Yes," said Wayne. "We'll let you go away in the boat you came over here in last. But you will have to take Goya with you."

Gomez grunted ready acceptance of this condition, and beckoning Wayne to follow, led the way back through the brush. They had gone nearly a mile, as it seemed to Wayne, when Gomez came to a sudden stand, fronting a small oak, on the same instant letting out a grunt of surprise and discomfiture. He stooped at the tree's foot

and examined the ground, and fumbled a knotted rope, round the tree.

Wayne was quick to divine the trouble; Ray had escaped.

"That's all right," Wayne reassured Gomez. "If he's got away, he'll find us. And we'll accept your intention to free him, and let you go just the same."

Gomez's face was eloquent of the relief he felt.

"You tell 'em?" he said.

"Yes, I'll tell them," said Wayne. "It'll be all right."

So they went back, Gomez mumbling to himself, doubtless in wonderment as to the how of Ray's deliverance. Wayne on his part gave himself to wondering if Ray would be in time to catch the *Mercier* before it should have left its old anchorage to go down to the new.

And so the two, so recently of enemy camps, trudged on together, to all appearance in perfectly friendly relation, each to the other. Arrived at the little house, Gomez expressed a wish to remain there till he should sail away; doubtless he feared to meet Loyo. And so Wayne went on alone, back to his comrades.

CHAPTER XXIX

RAY IN THE ENEMY CAMP

NOW back to that night when Ray's comrades left him squatting by the boat, while they groped into the interior of the little island, in search of Julian's treasure. He presently rose, and took a few turns up and down the beach; and finally he seated himself on the bow of the boat, and listened to the surf breaking on the reef, which was here fairly close in. He tried through the dark to discern the white of the breach, and so had his back to the wood encroaching on the beach.

Suddenly he heard something behind him, and turned; but hands gripped his arms, and a voice hissed in his ears — "No call out!" and he felt a revolver-butt, pushed against his cheek, warning of a clubbing if he should not comply.

He was pushed into the boat he had been guarding; his captors shoved off, and two of the four took up the oars and sent the boat at a lively rate up the shore. The men spoke but little, and that in whispers — in Spanish. Ray recognized Lafitte Goya as he that hissed the warning in his ear. Presently they joined the boat in which Goya had rowed over to the little isle; and both boats were then pointed toward the larger island.

Ray felt much dissatisfied with himself — to be caught napping while on guard; he had not even time to sound an alarm to his friends. He determined to make effort to mend the thing. So, when the boats had got some way from shore, and the man holding Ray had relaxed his vigilance somewhat, Ray contrived to get hold of his whistle. He took a deep breath and blew hard. He was pounced on at once, his call cut short off; and he supposed his effort had been vain. But, as we have learned, his call, maimed as it was, was yet heard.

He got no second opportunity; and Goya cursed him roundly — in language Ray did not pick the words of, though he sensed the heat of it — and urged the men at the oars. And then Ray heard Marat's gun, and he knew his friends were alive to the situation.

Though Ray suffered discomfort of his predicament, he experienced nothing like despair. "They wont eat me, anyhow," he reasoned. "They wouldn't size me up as a juicy piece if they *were* cannibals. It's just their old game of having somebody for ransom. I wonder if they'll figure me worth *all* of that treasure they're after. I wonder what kind of a sty they'll put me into. I'll squeal right if they shove me into that cave." Thus ran his thoughts.

The boat touched shore, and Ray was attended to the house by ungentle hands.

"Must think I'm a desperate character," said he, aloud.

"I'm the most harmless little cuss you ever saw — ask Wayne."

The men only grunted, and pushed him in through the door, and down to an end bunk. A boat-chain was then produced, and linked to both ankles, so close that he could not have put one foot six inches before the other. And then a guard was appointed, who began his duties by searching the captive for a possible file. The others went out.

Ray, always philosophical, was quite ready to make the most of his situation. He sat on the edge of his bed, jingled the chain with his feet a bit, and attracting the guard, pointed down to it.

"That thing's no good," he said. "When the time comes that'll melt off and go up in smoke." And he snapped his fingers to show how quick it would go.

The man shrugged his shoulders and set a puzzled look on his prisoner — half inclined to take him seriously.

There came a short period of quiet, during which Ray gazed at the lantern and whistled abstractedly. Then he looked up again to his guard.

"Say!" he began, so suddenly as to cause the guard to jump. "Did your mamma ever spank you on the bare?"

The man again shrugged his shoulders incomprehensively, though like all his comrades he understood English.

"Oh, she did," said Ray, assuming an answer. "Did it sting?"

The man merely continued his puzzled gaze on the prisoner.

"If your mother was here," continued Ray, "she'd tell you that Goya's only stringing you. He wouldn't give you a piece of that treasure even if he got it.— And he won't ever see it." And Ray smiled his assurance. "He won't ever get a look in. No, sir, that treasure's safe!"

Ray lay down for a time. And then came in Goya and some of the others, talking at a rate. So Ray sat up again; and watched the men roll into their bunks.

Presently Ray got an inclination to break in upon the guard's comfortable lethargy. With a sudden movement, he turned a startled look on his man, held up a finger, and appeared to listen.

The guard pricked up his ears for the sound.

"Sh!" said Ray. "I hear them making knots — hangman's knots." A momentary pause; then suddenly — "Did you see that thing hanging out there in the tree?" And he made as if pulling on a rope, round his neck, and protruding his tongue in mimicry of choking.

The guard fairly squirmed in his chair, with discomfort. And he called something down the aisle between the bunks; and Goya came forward. Ray lay down again, face to the wall, while the guard rattled off his complaint. Then Goya spoke.

"Na! No talk — you!" he thundered at Ray. "No talk!"

Ray turned to look, and waved his hand, and said:

"Aw, cheese the racket — *vamoose!* Go to bed, you — I want to go to sleep." And he turned his head, and began to breathe audibly, simulating sleep. The while, Goya sought to ease his discomfiture with cursing.

Ray's scoffing, cavalier manner upset him, quite. He began to see he'd caught a Tartar, and could not but realize that it was likely to hurt discipline — his hold on the men — if it should appear to them that this boy had power to belittle him.

Ray was soon asleep in truth, and slept none the worse for the situation he was in.

In the morning, he awoke to find a different man on guard. He got himself to a sitting posture, and looked at the man; rubbed his eyes, and looked again.

"Hello!" he says. "A new porter. Is breakfast ready in the dining ky-ar? Order ham and eggs for two. I like them turned over."

Beside Goya, a number of the men chanced to be near; and they observed Ray curiously, as he carried himself so boldly. Goya strode forward, furious in mien; Ray's attitude again irritated him.

"You no give order here!" He glared menacingly.

"Hello — who are you?" returned Ray, arms on knees, and glancing toward Goya with exasperating nonchalance. And then he looked down at the chain on his ankles and laughed, in a manner of forgetting Goya's presence.

Goya sputtered impotently, but couldn't find a word. Ray completely nonplussed him. Then he turned to the men and ordered them out, and he followed.

Ray presently looked up, feigning surprise, and addressed his guard.

"Well, what's become of the show?" he said. Then, hearing dishes rattle on the table outside, he added: "Say — come to think of it, I'm not hungry this morning. Tell the cook to hold off on that ham and egg order. But when you go to your breakfast, John, bring me a biscuit or something. I may want it after a while. Now see you don't forget it." And he shot the man a mandatory look — so masterful, it made him wince.

Ray was a quick thinker. And he had reasoned that Goya — irritated by his breakfast order, and all — would command the cook to withhold food from the prisoner; and so rehabilitate, in the minds of the men, his authority, so much belittled by Ray's demeanor. So Ray determined to be before him.

He read Goya rightly; for such was Goya's intention, though he had not as yet acted on it. And when the guard was sent out by a relief, to get his own breakfast, Goya's ears were singed with hearing the guard telling the cook that the prisoner had instructed him to say that nothing was to be prepared for his breakfast; he was not hungry.

Losing self-control, Goya, in a voice weak of rage,

told the cook to give the boy nothing all day — or any time — any time.

Some of the men exchanged glances. An intelligent onlooker would have observed that Goya had lost caste with his men by his exhibition of weakness.

When the guard went back to his post, he carried some bread and meat in his pocket. He doubtless felt that his blooming, imperturbable, imperious prisoner would, somehow, make it extremely uncomfortable for him if he came back empty-handed. He and the prisoner were soon alone, and this food found its way into Ray's hand. Ray took it with a condescending air.

"Well," he said, "I guess I better eat it now — one time's as good as another." And he ate the food, with apparently indifferent relish, though he was really very hungry, and it filled the bill quite to his taste.

Long before the morning had passed, Ray got evidence that something or other was forward. The men bustled in and out in some excitement. Three men went out carrying rifles. And Goya, he made out, was off on some expedition. Finally, a remaining four settled down within, and jabbered away for some time. At last, Ray began to have a craving for variety; time dragged with him.

"Looky here, fellows," says he. "I suppose you've all been out to have a look at the cemetery? — graveyard? — bone-yard? And did you notice the far little grave? — the *little* grave? That's for little Goya — a

little man who tries to make a big voice. He ought to be hanging onto his mamma's apron-strings." And he laughed. And the men looked as if in wonder at his recklessness. "He'll soon have on his last neck-tie," he continued. And he made show of a man, tongue out, choking in a hangman's noose.

At this eloquent suggestion, the men eyed one another uneasily. It was just then a shrill whistle, somewhere without, caused the men to jump in alarm. Some hurried out the back, some out the front door.

Next, Ray heard much excited talking outside. And he would have been much entertained, had he known it was over the notice of warning, just shot to the house on an arrow, by Robert.

Ray had made a number of unsuccessful attempts to get it out of the men — the cause of all the excitement, when Goya's party returned. And he was not a little puzzled when he observed the wounded Goya being carried in, groaning, and laid on his bed at the far end of the house.

Then, while Gomez waited on Lafitte Goya, all the others got their heads together outside Ray's end of the house; and the excessive buzzing of voices equalled that of a school-yard in recess time. "Worse than a sewing-bee," said Ray, aloud. "Wonder what's up."

Even the guard had deserted his post to join the caucus without.

"That Goya's been stung," Ray continued his speculations. "I'll bet our fellows are up to something."

That whistle was one of theirs; and I'll bet a firecracker our fellows know how Goya got hurt."

The chattering outside the wall finally ceased; the excited conference was over. That the men had come to some determination directly became plain to Ray, for there began a bustling activity that told of preparations for some definite movement.

"Something doing all right," Ray confided to himself.

At last there came a lull. And then the men fell into another kind of activity. It was the activity of unemployment. It seemed to Ray, they behaved very much like a bunch of passengers in a railway station, awaiting a train reported some hours late. Mostly, they wore their hands in their breeches pockets. Some tramped up and down between the bunks, oblivious of, or indifferent to, Goya's groaning and cursing; there was now no cringing avoidance of his sharp tongue. Others moved out and in the front door, as if on the lookout for the belated train. They talked but seldom. The uneasiness and suspense were manifest in every movement. They kept away from Lafitte Goya. They ignored Gomez, whom they seemed to have ostracised. Gomez dogged it back and forth among them, at times, always as if alert to dodge a blow or a kick.

And so it continued to sundown, and even far into the night. Ray lay in his bunk, waiting for some new turn in events. At last he spoke up, startling some of the silent ones from their gloomy reveries.

"Say!" he began. "You're the most unsociable bunch of owls that ever hooted at the moon. Why don't you whistle — tune up — dance a 'hoe-down,' fandango, or something? Enjoy yourself your last day on earth."

The men looked, grunted, shrugging their shoulders, and relapsed into their uneasy quiet again.

But when at last Ray could no longer see the white of the moonlight at the edge of the window-shade, there came a general buzz of low muttering. And in five minutes the front door vomited the whole company, barring Goya, who still lay at the other end of the house, voicing his pain.

"Gee! Some one must have found a gold-mine," observed Ray.

Ten minutes passed; and then Gomez stole in at the back door. Ray saw that he shook in some sort of perturbation. He set a candle on the table, and producing a piece of paper, began to write. When he finished, he went out at the back, directly to come in again with a hammer and chisel, and some pieces of rope, and a lantern. This time he came creeping toward Ray's bunk. A knife gleamed in his belt.

"I gon' sell you to your peoples," he said, half facing Ray, in his usual manner. "Stan' up an' make your han's behin'."

Ray complied. "Going to sell me to my peoples," he said, half in soliloquy. "Wonder what they think I'm worth?" Gomez was knotting the rope on his wrists.

At the other end of the house, Goya continued his quarrel with his pain. "Say," Ray addressed Gomez. "Sell Goya, too. My peoples will give more for him — just to hear his music. It'll sound good to them, you bet!"

Then he sat on the edge of the bunk, while Gomez worked at prying open links of the chain, soon freeing his feet. Gomez then set Ray's hat on his head, and said:

"Go oud the back."

Ray moved forward, Gomez following, holding a rope leash, fast to the bonds. Out the back door into the black night they went. The one driven, the other driving with a "To righ' — to lef'," they moved toward the forest. On the way Gomez pulled a rifle out of a bush.

Times stumbling, times scratched by the brush, they marched thus in the black forest for near a half hour. Then Gomez called a halt in a circle of brush at the foot of a tree. And soon he had the rope leash round the tree-trunk.

"Well," now began Ray, "what's next, you old scarecrow?"

"We wait," said Gomez.

"Wait for what?" said Ray. "What is it you're going to sell me for?"

"Na — no talk," ordered Gomez. And Ray could get nothing more out of the man.

The only sound was the distant breaking of the water on the reef. From time to time, Gomez made excursions away, short at first, but gradually lengthened in duration.

It was a weary time ; but finally day dawned. During the absences of Gomez, Ray worked at stretching his bonds, using his long fingers. And at last he slipped out one slender hand ; a few moments, and the other hand was free.

He pushed through toward the sound of the surf. Quickly gaining the beach, he took to the hard, moist sand, and made good speed to the north.

Presently he stopped short. He thought he heard a whistle. A minute he listened. He heard no repetition, and decided he must have been mistaken. And so he set off on the run again. He came to marshy ground. He was near the stream that came from the hills. He turned east and plunged into the forest ; soon arrived at the base of the ridge. He climbed the ridge. Arrived at the top, he looked down on the lagoon to the *Mercier's* anchorage. There was no *Mercier* there ! He held his breath as his eyes swept all visible waters. Not a sight of her !

He rushed down the east slope, through the trees, to the shore.

“ She’s gone ! ” he told himself. And he felt an awful sinking within.

But he soon got a grip on himself.

“ Oh, pshaw ! ” he said. “ They’ve just moved her, somehow.— But they might have broken it to a fellow gently,” he complained.

Since there was but the one way the *Mercier* could have gone, Ray took up the march southward, on the beach.

As he hurried on, he gave his mind to speculation as to the meaning of the *Mercier's* leaving the anchorage. He reasoned nothing ill of the thing, in view of Lafitte Goya's state, and the actions of the men. It was Goya's party that was in a bad way, if anything. And so he continued on, hoping to come up with good news.

A half hour had hardly gone, when he turned the corner of the island and came in view of the house where he had so recently lain captive. One glance down the beach revealed the other schooner still at the old anchorage. There was life on board. "That's where the men went," he said. But no sign of the *Mercier* (it seemed). His heart began to fall again.

He crept closer to the house, behind a screen of brush. Presently his eye glimpsed what seemed a familiar form, at the door. Hope urging, he ran to the house. Arrived at the corner, he heard Goya's groaning through the boards. Then he crept along the wall, and a pleasing sound came to his ear. It was Wayne's voice, within.

Three strides brought Ray to the door. He knocked. Suddenly the talk within ceased.

"What's that!" Again Wayne's voice.

"Anybody home?" called Ray.

The door burst open.

"Ray!" called a number of voices.

"Hello, fellows," said Ray. He stepped within.
"How's your liver?"

Looking round, Ray missed some of the company.

“Where’s Slicky and Norris, and the rest?”

“They’re anchoring the *Mercier* down where the *Miguel* was,” said Wayne.

“*Miguel was?*” said Ray.

“Yes,” returned Wayne. “Didn’t you know the *Miguel* had sailed?”

“Here they come, now,” said Phil, outside the door, “some in the boat, some on shore.”

CHAPTER XXX

THE TREASURE

NORRIS brought every one from the *Mercier*, even Rufe, who had barely set foot on the island since the arrival three weeks ago. All faces beamed with good cheer.

“Well, by Jove! There’s Ray!” said Norris, coming from the boat. “Well, boy, what have you done with your Dago friends?”

“Dunno,” returned Ray. “I guess they got peeved at Goya and me. All at once they hiked out — didn’t say where they were going, good-bye, or anything. But they left Gomez to play with me, seeing Goya had a sore toe, or something.”

“Gomez!” said Norris, and his eyes went big.

“Yes,” said Ray. “I guess they got sore at him, too. He and I played horse, and he drove me up in the woods and hitched me to a tree, and —”

“Say, you-all,” broke in Rufe. “Whah is dat ’ar cook shanty you b’en a-talkin’ ’bout?”

While Rufe took possession of the cook-house, and banged things about, setting to rights that important limb of the establishment, Marat, Norris, and the boys held final council over the disposition of Lafitte Goya and

Gomez. The result of the conference was communicated to Goya by Captain Marat.

"Thee boys have decide," he said, "to allow you and Gomez to sail away in your whale-boat."

Goya's expression showed with what eagerness he grasped this offer of freedom.

"W'en you will like to go?" said Jean Marat.

The man rose on his arms in bed.

"Go now!" he said.

"You feel well enough?" questioned Marat.

"Yez — yez!" Goya squirmed round and set his well foot on the floor in his eagerness.

Marat and Wayne walked down to the little house to Gomez. Gomez was no less eager to quit the island at once.

"Well, come along w'en we call," said Marat.

"You keep Loyo 'way?" begged Gomez.

"Yes," said Jean Marat. "We won't let Loyo see you."

And so, while some dragged the whale-boat to the water, others got sufficient food together; and a pair of crutches were improvised for Goya's use; and the sail loosed.

When Goya had taken his seat at the tiller, a whistle was blown; and Gomez came sneaking up the beach, and with the nimbleness of a cat, leaped into the boat. Then the boys gave a strong shove, and the last remnants of the enemy left the shore.

Ray spoke the parting shot.

"Well, away you go," he said. "If you fellows decide to come back, the cemetery's all there waiting for you."

"They'll never come back if they can help it," said Norris.

Gomez hauled up the sail, that caught the breeze at once; and the boys watched till the boat was a wee speck on the western horizon.

"Well, we've got it all to ourselves now," observed Robert.

"Hurrah!" shouted Phil.

"Yes, all right," said Ray. "Whoop her up, Phil. It's all a picnic from now on."

"I want to thank all you boys," said Julian Lamartine, "and Captain Marat, and Mr. Norris."

"That's all right, Julian, boy," said Norris. "I, for one, never had so much good sport — and that's saying some. And I'm going home and tell my folks about it — all that are left." And there was a wee pensive note in that last.

Ray's story of his adventures was interrupted by a banging on Rufe's dish-pan. "Pan pan — pan pan — pan pan — pan pan!" it rang.

"Eight bells, fellows," said Ray. "And I'm as hungry as a Shanghai rooster."

Dinner over, preparations were made to get after Julian's treasure. The boat left the shore bearing Julian

and Loyo, the principals in the business, and with them Wayne, Norris, Leslie, and Charles. Across the sound, and down the west shore of the little island they rowed, mindless of the broiling tropic sun. Happy faces turned to the west. It was down, over that rim of sea, the enemy had dropped out of their lives, never again to harrow them.

They put the boat on the beach at the spot where Ray had been taken captive; and there being now no need to guard the boat, after pulling it out of reach of the tide, all pushed through the brush, and straight to the mouth of the cave. A light was made in the lantern, and then a few steps forward in the cool cavern, and the party stood where the little spring bubbled up. Wayne gave the shovel to Julian, and in a few minutes the copper coffer was uncovered again.

"Well I say!" said Norris. "That old fellow sure knew how to find a good hiding-place."

"It is just like Mr. Pedro," said black Loyo. "He was alway very clever."

Wayne helped Julian to clear away sand and oyster shells from one side.

"Now pry it out with the pick," suggested Wayne.

The square copper box was pulled out of the little stream, and stood completely revealed, on the floor of the cave.

"He's got it sealed all round the cover with pitch," said Norris, looking close.

And then the coffer was borne out into daylight and down to the boat; and within the hour, it stood on the table in the bunk-house, a wonderful show for a baker's dozen pairs of eyes.

"I think I see that box last time jest about a year ago," said Loyo. "Pedro use' to keep his papers in there — and I never noticed that he took it away."

Julian and Loyo knocked the pitch off the sides where the cover joined. And then Julian swung back the lid. A padding of old newspapers first presented, and then a square of white oilcloth; and on the top of a number of packets (all tied) lay a paper on which was written: \$175,000." In one corner nestled a soft leather bag; in another corner a large-mouthed bottle in which could be seen a paper, rolled. Julian had out the bottle, removed the cork, and pulled forth the paper. This he unrolled.

"A will," said Norris.

Julian read the will aloud. It bequeathed to Julian Lamartine all the possessions, real and personal, of Pedro Lamartine, including two store buildings on Chartres Street, New Orleans, and a business property in Pensacola. The will was duly attested, and bore the name of a Pensacola attorney.

Next, Julian seized out the leather bag. He poured the contents into a large soup plate — handsfull of various-sized pearls. Even Loyo marvelled over the gems, so perfect in form and luster.

"Pedro saved all the best ones," he said. "He saved them for Julian."

Julian drew out of the bag a bit of paper. It was addressed to himself, and recommended him to take the pearls to Paris, where they would find a most profitable market.

"And from the looks of all those beauties," said Norris, "they'll bring a nice, comfortable fortune in themselves."

"Yes," said Loyo, who smilingly, and with a practiced eye, peered among the wee, white, glistening marbles, poking with his contrasting black finger. "Yes, and there ain't less than twenty thousand dollars' worth there, if I have learnt anything about pearls."

"Say, I'd like to tell Goya what he missed," interposed Ray.

"There's over a dozen mighty rare pearls there," added Loyo. "See this one, Julian — and this — and this here. Ain't she jest got the color?" And he pushed it with his finger.

"Yes," said Julian. "You see," and he turned to the boys, "Pedro taught Loyo and me a good deal about pearls. Loyo understands them almost as well as Pedro did."

And finally, after a peek at some of the green and yellow bills of money, the treasure was all tucked back in the copper box again, and shoved under a bunk in a cor-

ner. And then Rufe set out an early supper. And after, the boys got out and looked about them, realizing their hard-won release from the tension of anxiety and dread. And they seemed now for the first time, to come to real appreciation of the beauty of the place they were in: the palms — royal palms, cabbage palms, cocoanut palms — backed by grand, rugged live oaks hung with festoons of Spanish moss, and the other varied woods; and the pretty hill peeking over the tree-tops; and the white beach; and the clear water of the sound; and beyond — the shore, and the palms and hills of the little island.

“I shall hate to leave the islands,” said Wayne to Julian, “now since we’ve got them all to ourselves.”

“It’s been my home a good many years,” returned Julian. “It all seemed very beautiful to me till Lafitte Goya came.”

“Many a time,” said Loyo, “I threatened Pedro, if he didn’t take Julian back, I would. But Pedro was so scared of his life, and I see Julian so contented, and so — mostly happy, I jest had to give in and wait, like Pedro said.”

The boys were bubbling over. Ray started a game of leap-frog with Phil. Robert joined in. And then one after another all the other boys got in the line, including Wayne and Julian. Then Norris, catching the fever, bantered Jean Marat; and they two were directly leaping over the backs of the boys. And finally, out from the cook-house came running — Rufe, who seized on Loyo.

“ Say, you black niggah,” he said, grinning. “ We-all has jes’ got to be in dis heah.” And so the two blacks rushed into the undulating line.

“ Halleluyah ! ” called out Rufe, as he went scrambling over boy after boy. “ Li’le Julian uster go ovah mah back jes’ about like I’m a-doin’— O-wee ! Mah bref is jes’ ’bout gone up.”

With shouting and laughter, the line rolled on, caterpillar fashion, down toward the little house, old Rufe falling out twice or thrice for breath ; but always coming back to the charge again.

Arrived at the house, the line broke ; and, led by Norris, they went in through the door. One look around, and Norris strode to a tool-chest in a corner. Reaching in, he pulled out a violin-case.

“ Ah ! here’s my old squeaker, safe and sound,” he said. And he brought forth the fiddle.

A few moments of hurried tuning, and with easy grace, he struck up a quick-step. Rufe jumped to the middle of the floor ; Loyo followed ; and the two darkies, facing one another, danced with vigour. Many hands clapped to the time ; and voices shouted, darky fashion. The two blacks vied with one another in queer antics, and the boys roared their glee. Presently, Norris struck into the “ Virginia Reel.” And then all lined up, and went capering up and down, a pair at a time. And next, the fiddle gave forth a Spanish dance tune. And here Jean Marat snapped his fingers — for castenets — and danced with

the correct step, till the boys, urged by the music and the example, set their fingers snapping, and their feet going, with greater or less success; but with entire enthusiasm and no end of fun.

When at last dusk gave the signal, Norris's fiddle stopped, and they all marched back to the bunk-house, laughing and chattering, like a gay party back home in civilization; and that sombrous, anxious time of but a few hours back, had begun to seem like an old memory.

Captain Marat, seconded by Loyo, recommended an early turning in. When all were in their bunks, and Rufe had blown out the light, Ray, as usual, had the last word.

"Gentlemen!" he called from his bunk, "I have to thank you for a most hilariously — excruciatingly — ram-bunktiously pleasant evening. Good night."

CHAPTER XXXI

HOME BOUND

THE first of the boys awake in the morning, were not long routing out the others. At breakfast, Captain Marat said it was time to determine on the next move. The boys were loud for an excursion about the larger of the Pearl Islands; and there were those who demanded to be shown the cave and the hollow Signal Oak, so much talked about by those who had visited them.

The excursionists made an early start; all went, except Jean Marat and Loyo, who stayed to keep camp. Loyo planned to gather together the effects of Julian and Pedro, ready to be taken aboard the *Mercier*.

First, Robert took his comrades to the bush where first he concealed the wireless set, and pointed out the very spot. Then the march went back to the second hill and into the cave; and a lighted candle revealed the narrows where the sentinel was posted, and farther up, the place where Wayne's blanket had been spread.

"When I found him," explained Robert, "he had his foot chained to that stalagmite."

Then it was out by the little hole in the east slope of the hill. And here Robert told again how he had discovered this wee exit. Recrossing the ridge, Robert led the way

to where the stream forked. Getting the boys into the oak, he showed them the place in the thicket into which he had lowered himself from the limb by a rope, and where he lay so many hours while the search party passed and dusk drew slowly on. Next, the way went up over the hills again, to the northeast corner of the island. And here each of the boys had to squirm under the Spanish bayonet plant into the hollow oak, and up the rope ladder to the perch above, whence Robert had signalled the *Mercier* by wireless. And he had to go all over the experience again, in detail.

Rufe showed a wry face, and rubbed himself, all the while he clung to his limb. And when they made ready to descend, he said:

“Say, you-all kin go down dat ’ar debbil’s way. Ah’m a-gwine to git down by de outside fire-oxcape. I reckons I has got ’bout two inches ob a Spanish-bay’net in me; an’ I gwine to sit lop-sided tells some o’ you pulls it out.”

The noon hour had just passed, when the party got back to the bunk-house. Smoke was coming from the cook-house stack. Marat had been busy with his cast-net, and showed a goodly mess of fish. And Loyo had been to the oyster beds, and had something, as well, to show for it.

It was a gay time at the turtle-turning that night, under the full moon. In the morning, everything was hustled aboard the schooner *Mercier*; and the time approached, to set sail homeward.

It became somewhat a solemn occasion for Julian; and his last act was to lay wreaths of wild flowers on the graves of the two loyal Jap divers. When he took his seat in the boat, his treasure-filled copper coffer at his feet, he looked back at the little house; and his eyes overflowed.

The schooner floated out the west passage on the ebbing tide. Then the blocks rattled, as the sails went up to catch the westerly breeze. Julian stood by the rail, as the island's shore swept by; and he was still there when the island showed as but a little speck on the south sea, some hours after. And Loyo, some way off, on the deck, kept his eyes on Julian.

"I know just how he feels," observed Wayne to Loyo.

Loyo's eyes filled at this expression of sympathy. "It's the only home Julian's knowed much about for many year. And I been longing for this day — oh, a mighty long time."

The *Mercier* sailed back over the self same route she had come. And at the first touch with civilization, there went many a letter home; and a telegram to Marvin Blaisdell, with good news for Julian's grandfather, Charles Lamartine. At Pensacola, a day's stop was made. The lawyer who had drawn old Pedro Lamartine's will was found, and Julian's interests there left in his care. Then on to New Orleans — more messages going ahead. Lake Borgne, the Rigolets, Lake Ponchartrain were passed. And the *Mercier* was picked up in

the New Basin by a tug, on a September day, before noon. She was dropped at Claiborne Street, her old mooring.

Two figures stood on the quay.

"Oh, there's Mr. Blaisdell!" called out several of the boys at once.

"And Mr. Lamartine!" said Wayne.

Marvin Blaisdell caught the mooring-rope.

"Well, boys, and here you are safe back again," said Marvin Blaisdell, leading Mr. Lamartine over the schooner's rail.

Old Mr. Lamartine had his eyes fixed on Julian, who stood, returning the gaze. Then in another moment the lad stepped forward, and grandfather and grandson — not a word spoken — were in each other's arms.

And then old Mr. Lamartine put his slender hand on Julian's shoulder. "My little Julian," he said.

"I knew you, grandfather," said Julian. "I didn't think I would."

"You look just so natural," declared the old man. "Only some grown."

"Well, friends," soon interrupted Marvin Blaisdell, "we are all due at Madame Marat's."

Julian's copper coffer — in a trunk — was put in a waiting carriage with Mr. Lamartine, Julian, and Loyo. Other carriages were got, while the *Mercier* was made snug; and soon the whole crew, including Rufe, went rolling to Madame Marat's domicile.

The greetings between mother and son over, the guests were put to a feast as only such as Jean Marat's mother knew how to put together.

The happy party had not long been seated, the beaming Madame Marat heaping the boys' plates with her cookery, when there came a jingling of the door-bell. And Madame must hurry out, in a minute to usher in, with words of welcome, a sailor man, a stranger to the boys.

"Ah!" said Jean Marat, rising. "Roget Martel!" And then some talk in French, followed by introductions all round; and a new place set. Marat requested the newcomer to tell his news to the whole table.

Roget Martel, it was explained, was an old friend of the Marats, and master of a fruit-schooner, plying between Central America and New Orleans.

"I jus' come in," he said, "an' w'en we come by Clai-borne Strit, in the Basin, I see the *Mercier*; an' I say: 'Ah, Jean is home once more'; an' I call to one, who say the *Mercier* have jus' come in. An' w'en we dock, I come righ' over to tell Jean thee news."

And then he went on to tell how, when lying in a Central American port, one of his men came with a report that a fellow was on the lookout for a buyer for a small schooner to be sold cheap.

"I sen' for thee fellow," Martel said. "An' we row to the schooner. An' ver' quick I see id is the *Miguel*, thee name all paint out an' new one paint on. An' I take thee man back to my schooner — to bargain — an' I tell

thee man how I know the *Miguel*, an' I know he an' hees frien's have steal her. He get scare', an' tell me 'bout thee island."

And here came a short and imperfect account of doings on the Pearl Isles.

"I move my schooner," continued Martel, "close to thee *Miguel*, led the man go, an' sen' for the harbor master, an' explain to him. An' we feex up the paper'; and w'en we sail, I put some men on the *Miguel*. An' now she lie over in thee Basin."

The story of Captain Roget Martel gave the boys a sharp turn of surprise, little as they had thought ever to hear of either their vanquished enemies of the islands or the schooner *Miguel* again. And before dark it was beyond resistance, to go and have a look at the schooner, over in the canal, which they had last seen — and with pleasurable emotions — sailing away to the west.

And now they trod the deck of the *Miguel* with a new feeling; here had come home the last piece of Julian's property, bequeathed him by Pedro Lamartine. It seemed the enemy were destined to have no profit of their ill pursuit on the isles.

"Look here, fellows," called Ray, pointing. "Look what a chunk that bomb gnawed out of the deck when it went off that night."

"Well, I say!" marvelled Norris. "That was some vicious barker. I never hope to enjoy fireworks like I

did that night—and didn't we keep those cusses guessing!"

For nearly a week, our boys remained in New Orleans, guests of the Lamartines. And before they took train for their homes in the north, Julian had worked out plans for a cruise in the West Indies, which should be in the late winter, and was to take in the Pearl Isles. Old Mr. Lamartine and Marvin Blaisdell were to be of the party; and Madame Marat promised to sail with them and mother the crew. For Julian, now fairly rolling in wealth, meant to charter, or buy, a fully-appointed yacht, with staterooms and, all, a vessel of which he declared Jean Marat would be proud to be captain.

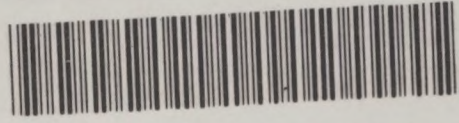
Grant Norris was the only one of all the friends who gave a doubtful reply.

"Three months ago," he said, "I would have had only one answer. But it's you boys got me in the notion of going home. And home is as far ahead as I can see, now. But let me hear from you a month or two before you sail again in the direction of the Pearl Isles."

THE END

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